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BOWIE

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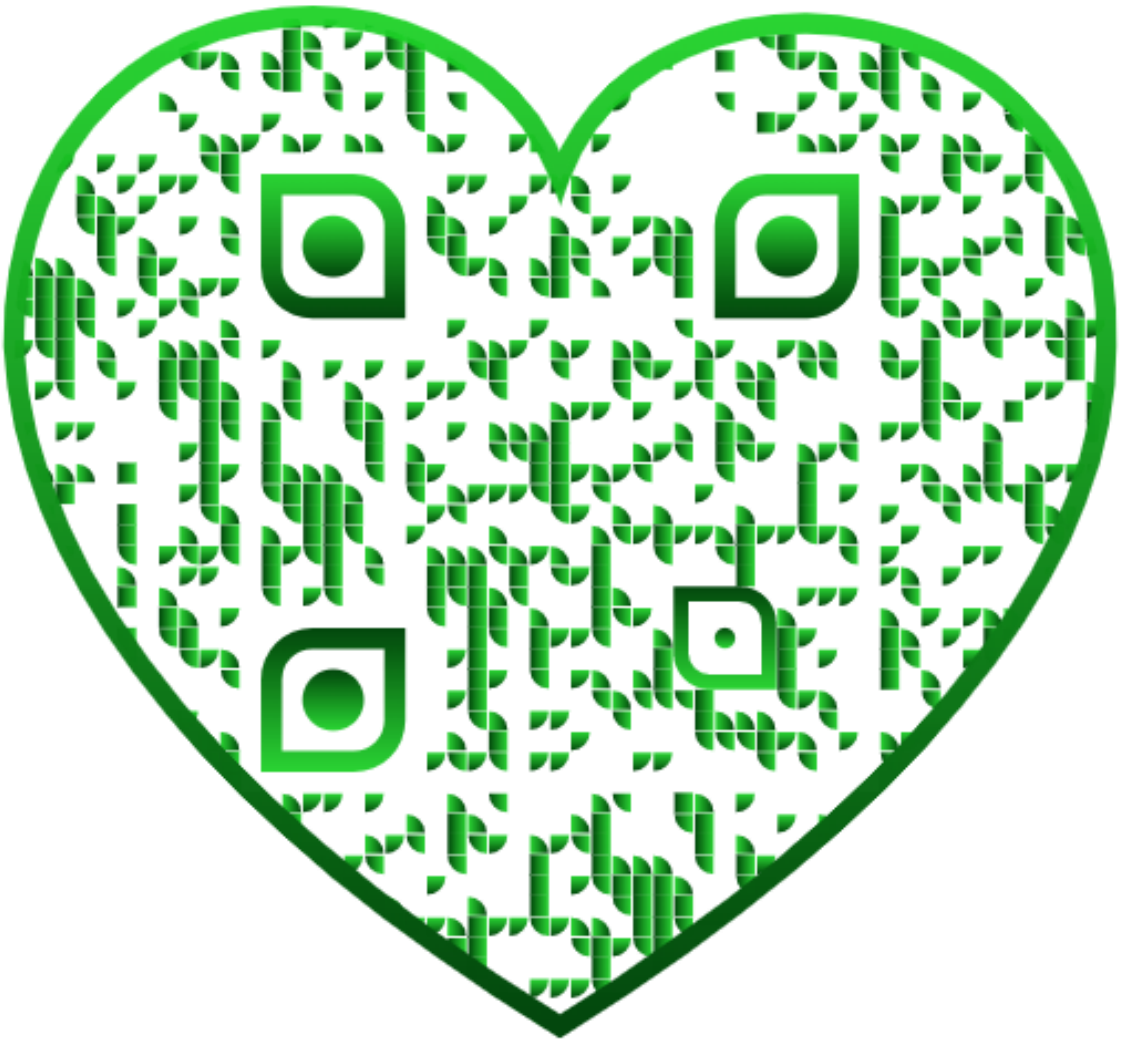

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WELCOME

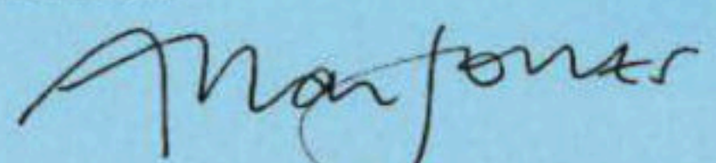
London: September, 1977. I'm at the Dorchester on Park Lane to interview David Bowie, sitting in a small ante-room of a plush penthouse suite, one of a number of journalists waiting to talk to him. There's fruit in baskets, soft drinks, tea, coffee. It's like the waiting room in a private hospital. We speak as we wait in whispers, like someone's dying next door.

I'm eventually led into the main suite and left there. It's empty, no trace anywhere of Bowie. I look around and notice the windows to the balcony are open. Lace curtains are billowing into the room, sunlight streaming through them. Then, surrounded by a glowing halo of light that can only be described as celestial, David Bowie steps into the room from the balcony and stands there. I'm dazzled, rooted to the spot, as slack-jawed as a hillbilly.

"Allan," he says, "so very pleased to meet you at last. Brian's told me so much about you." He's referring to Brian Eno, who I've interviewed several times. This is clearly the D-Day – the *Omaha Beach* – of charm offensives. I'm bowled over, totally.

Bowie, after all, is one of my musical idols, has been since I first heard "London Boys" on Radio Luxembourg in 1966. I love the *Space Oddity*, *The Man Who Sold The World* and *Hunky Dory* albums, but my mind, like many others, is truly blown by *Ziggy Stardust*. I see the Ziggy tour at Bristol's Colston Hall on June 13, 1972. "Hello, Bristol," he says with a sexy little twitch of his hips that makes the young girls scream. "I'm David Bowie. These are The Spiders From Mars. Let's *rock*." No-one had seen anything like it. In May 1976, I was at the Wembley Empire Pool for all six of the Station To Station concerts, which remain among the most exciting rock shows I've ever seen. More recently *Station To Station*, *Low* and *"Heroes"* are among the best records I've ever heard. To one extent or another, I've been enthralled by everything that's followed.

Bowie's complete story's here in the pages that follow, told via classic interviews, unseen for decades, from the archives of *Melody Maker*, *NME*, *Disc And Music Echo* and *Uncut* that cover the entirety of his remarkable career and its many wild mutations. We also take an in-depth look at his music, with new reviews of every Bowie album to date, from *David Bowie* to *Reality*, one of the most thrilling journeys in the whole of rock'n'roll.



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RELEASE DATE 01 | JUNE | 1967

DAVID BOWIE

The 20-year-old Bowie launches himself as chronicler of Weird England, only to be thwarted – perhaps fortunately – by *Sgt Pepper*. *By David Cavanagh*

POOR DAVID JONES. For five years, the Bromley boy had been hawking his saxophone around London, singing with a string of R'n'B bands, and not a sniff of success. The Konrads: rejected by Decca in 1963. The King Bees: voted a 'miss' on *Juke Box Jury* in 1964. The Manish Boys and The Lower Third: a pair of Shel Talmy misfires in 1965. And finally, in 1967, some genius at Deram Records decides that *David Bowie*, Jones' debut album, should come out on the same day as *Sgt Pepper*.

It was an inevitable case of No Contest, and another setback for the 20-year-old Jones, who'd been simply desperate to escape a suburban upbringing of suffocating conformity. To his friends and associates, Jones had shown himself to be energetic, creative, driven, self-centred and emotionally difficult to gauge. As a performer, he'd grown increasingly theatrical. The Buzz, his 1966 backing group, noticed his brazen stagecraft, hands on hips, finger on lips, projecting a star's aura even as the failed 45s accumulated ("Do Anything You Say", "I Dig Everything", "Rubber Band"). A semi-autobiographical single from 1965, "The London Boys" – cancelled by Pye but later re-recorded as a b-side – pictured him rattling around Soho like a pinball, hustling and networking, wearing "*flashy clothes*", maturing fast. Prior to recording it, he'd shed his prosaic surname to avoid confusion with Davy Jones, the English-born Broadway star (*Oliver!*) and future Monkee. The inspiration for the new name was Jim Bowie, an American pioneer and folk hero, who carried a nine-inch blade and died defending the Alamo. From tame Bromley to the Wild West in one bold move.

Bowie's music in 1966–7, though, couldn't have been more English if it had worn a bowler hat. Gone were the R'n'B influences of Muddy Waters and Little Richard. His mannered vocals, cloning the *how-d'yer-do* phrasing of stage singer Anthony Newley, tucked a metaphorical brolly under the arm and sauntered into town with a wink in the eye. It was pre-rock, it was music hall, it was BBC Light Entertainment. And yet, if you contemplate it a certain way, it's almost psychedelia. In a period when dozens of English groups wrote about toffee shops, watchmakers, uncles and aunts, stiff-backed colonels and brigadiers, Bowie's toytown characters shared recognisable elements of the national psychedelic identity. His world, perhaps, was more Chigley and Trumpton than Edwardiana and LSD (two of his characters meet at a bandstand "*while a little chappie waves a golden wand*"), but it was a world not without darkness, not without weirdness. He admitted to basing some characters on family members, and we all know what a strange family he came from.

In Bowie's autumnal England, nobody has a niche. The kids aren't groovy, the middle-aged aren't happy, and the elderly are as blank and bewildered as Scott Walker's two ragged soldiers. In the opening song we meet Uncle Arthur, a simple-minded fellow who forgot to fly the nest ("*Back to mother, it's another empty day*"). Arthur surprises everyone by marrying and leaving home at the age of 32 – only to realise his error and fly back predictably to his maternal comfort zone. The album's third track, "Rubber Band" (an unsuccessful single in December '66), seems a quaint Sunday stroll in the park, but the WWI veteran watching the band, in a last-minute twist, is revealed to have lost the girl of his dreams to the bandleader many years before. Bowie's punchlines keep coming: in "Little Bombardier", a decommissioned soldier falls on hard times and drinks away his days in isolation. Then two children befriend him in a cinema, whereupon his depression lifts ("*his life was fun and his heart was full of joy*"), but the police suspect him of ulterior motives and menacingly warn him off. No wonder Bowie detected a kindred spirit in Syd Barrett, whose "Arnold Layne" ended with a similar humiliation of a little man by faceless authority.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Here is a new talent that deserves attention, for though David Bowie has no great voice, he can project words with a cheeky "side" that is endearing yet not precocious."
DISC AND MUSIC ECHO, JUNE 10, 1967

"Sounding like a young, good-looking Anthony Newley with the writing ability of Cat Stevens, and better, it's surprising the talented Mr Bowie hasn't made a bigger impact on the pop scene."
MELODY MAKER, JUNE 17, 1967

TRACKMARKS | David Bowie

1. **Uncle Arthur** ★★
2. **Sell Me A Coat** ★★★
3. **Rubber Band** ★★
4. **Love You Till Tuesday** ★★★
5. **There Is A Happy Land** ★★★
6. **We Are Hungry Men** ★★
7. **When I Live My Dream** ★★
8. **Little Bombardier** ★★
9. **Silly Boy Blue** ★★★
10. **Come And Buy My Toys** ★★
11. **Join The Gang** ★★
12. **She's Got Medals** ★
13. **Maid Of Bond Street** ★★
14. **Please Mr Gravedigger** ★★

RELEASED: June 1, 1967
LABEL: Deram
PRODUCED BY: Mike Vernon
RECORDED AT: Decca Studios, London
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, sax, arrangement); Derek Boyes (organ); Derek Fearnley (bass, arrangement); John Eager (drums)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: Did not chart

For all that, however, the perky oboes and trombones of Derek 'Dek' Fearnley's orchestrations are a mighty long way from Barrett's Floyd. Even Ray Davies and Paul McCartney, British pop's most nostalgic writers, would have blushed at some of these passé, sentimental ditties and their insanely rosy-cheeked arrangements. And probably shaken their heads in disbelief, too, at bizarre conceits like "We Are Hungry Men" (a glimpse of forthcoming Bowie messiahs and pogroms) or "Please Mr Gravedigger" (a murderer's soliloquy in a cemetery, interrupted by occasional sneezing). Bowie and The Buzz – his backing musicians here – are much more enjoyable when the songwriting is less garrulous and the humour not so forced. "Sell Me A Coat" and "There Is A Happy Land" (because it's full of children) are pleasant, guileless, folk-pop ballads. "Silly Boy Blue" – still in Bowie's repertoire when he recorded a session for John Peel's *Top Gear* radio programme a year later – takes the listener unawares by switching the scene to Lhasa in Tibet and the Potala Palace, and ends up becoming a curiously moving song about rebirth and the Buddhists' realms of being.

One song that didn't appear on the album, but came to epitomise Bowie's 'Newley phase', is "The Laughing Gnome", a single released in April '67. The helium-pitched gnomes were another of his resounding commercial flops, but had their revenge when Deram's parent company, Decca, resurrected them in 1973 (No 6, UK singles chart) to capitalise on Bowie's new-found fame. The song has been a source of squirming embarrassment to him ever since. But we should remember, as we giggle at Bowie's youthful indiscretions, that he was a talented boy in search of a direction (which isn't a crime), and that the alternative to the gnomes would have been worse – silence; a shame-faced return to Bromley – denying us *Diamond Dogs*, *Low* and the Thin White Duke.

And here's another thought. What if his debut album had been a hit? What if all the people who rushed to pick up *Sgt Pepper* had bought *David Bowie* instead? "I'd probably be in the cast of *Les Misérables* by now," he once suggested, and you can imagine the shudder as he said it.

Bowie, September 1967, photographed for *Fabulous 208* magazine. He's wearing then-manager Ken Pitt's shirt!

"I'M A WRITER. I REALLY WOULDN'T LIKE TO MAKE SINGING A FULL-TIME OCCUPATION"

After a long apprenticeship, the young David Jones slowly finds a persona that suits him. Enter David Bowie, constructed from London boy, musical theatre, Tibetan Buddhism, 2001, Beckenham Arts Lab and a whole lot of charm...

TAKEN FROM
MELODY MAKER
26/02/1966

WITHOUT DOUBT David Bowie has talent and, also without doubt, it will be exploited. For Mr Bowie, a 19-year-old Bromley boy, not only writes and arranges his own numbers, but he is also helping Tony Hatch to write a musical score, and the numbers for a TV show. As if that wasn't enough, David also designs shirts and suits for John Stephen, of the famed Carnaby Street clan.

And his ambition? "I want to act," says Bowie modestly, "I'd like to do character parts. I think it takes a lot to become somebody else… it takes some doing. Also I want to go to Tibet. It's a fascinating place, y'know. I'd like to take a holiday and look inside the monasteries, The Tibetan monks, Lamas, bury themselves inside mountains for weeks and only eat every three days. They're ridiculous and it's said they live for centuries."

It should be stated that David is a well-read student of astrology and a believer of reincarnation… "As far as I'm concerned the whole idea of Western life, that's the life we live now, is wrong. These are hard convictions to put into songs, though. At the moment I write nearly all of my songs round London. No, I should say the people who live in London, and the lack of real life they have. The majority just don't know what life is."

Every number in David's stage act is an original that he has written and, as he says, the theme is usually London kids and their lives. However, it leads to trouble.

"Several of the younger teenagers' programmes wouldn't play 'Can't Help Thinking About Me', because it's about leaving home. The number relates several incidents in every teenager's life, and leaving home is something that always comes up.

"Tony Hatch and I rather wanted to do another number I had written. It goes down very well in the stage act, and lots of fans said I should have released it, but Tony and I thought the words were a bit too strong.

"In what way? Well, It tells the story of life as some teenagers saw it, but we didn't think the lyrics were quite up many people's street. I do it onstage, though, and we're probably keeping it for an EP or maybe an LP. Hope, hope! It's called 'Now You've Met The London Boys', and mentions pills and generally belittles the London nightlife scene.

"I've lived in London and been brought up here, and I find it's a great subject to write songs about. And remember with all original numbers the audiences are hearing numbers they've never heard before, so this makes for a varied stage act," said David. "It's risky, because the kids aren't familiar with the tunes, but I'm sure it makes their musical life more interesting." He could be right.

MELODY MAKER

TAKEN FROM
DISC AND MUSIC ECHO
11/10/1969

DAVID BOWIE IS 22 years old, thin, with a halo of fair hair, a delicately soft face and two cold eyes. One is pale kitten blue and the other green, and it makes it rather disconcerting to talk to him.

If he reminds you of anyone it is a gentle mixture of Bob Dylan and Donovan with 90 per cent pure Bowie. He says he sings like "Dylan would have done if he's been born in England" – and he's an absolute charmer.

His charm is so overpowering that it's given him more freedom to achieve his ideals than you'd have thought possible in this day and age. Local authorities wilt before his smile – attendants in car parks (not known for their cordiality) are given to rush about finding him parking spaces even when they're full up.

Bowie was born in Brixton and now lives in Beckenham, Kent. His father, "a delicate Yorkshireman", recently died. And his half-brother, whom Bowie considers a genius, is in hospital. So most of his tenderness is directed towards his mother whom he takes to the studio and *Top Of The Pops* to cheer her up.

Before "Space Oddity" his name may not have meant anything to you at all. But in fact David Bowie has been tottering on the brink of enormous fame for some time – diverting his energies into many channels,

CONTINUES OVER»

with his music often taking a back seat to other driving ambitions.

His history is amazing. Four years ago he was playing with a group called The Buzz. Then he made a few very good records on his own – "The London Boys" and "Rubber Band" among them – where he sounded amazingly like Anthony Newley.

He has also worked with Lindsay Kemp's mime company, which he loved. And a girl who saw him work was once moved to remark that she felt extremely motherly towards him because his ribs stick out so much.

Between being engrossed in Buddhism and the work of Stravinsky, Bowie formed what he considers his biggest achievement to date – the Arts Laboratory in Beckenham. This threatens to become much more than the name implies, and is now set to turn Beckenham into the first self-sufficient community in Britain.

Although all these outlets don't strike you as being compatible, Bowie says of course they ARE, because they are all concerned with communication. He says he hates sounding pretentious, but when you get down to the nitty gritty, communicate is really all he's trying to do.

David Bowie is an extraordinary human being. Brixton would not seem a part of London given to the production of dreamers and idealists, but Bowie is both.

"I had a very happy childhood. I was lonely but I never wanted and I never went hungry, but I saw people deprived around me and kids going to school with their shoes falling apart and I suppose, yes, it did leave an impression on me that I wanted them to have better. I'm really a born idealist. I worry and I don't think before leaping in, but I believe there are only three things worth talking about – love, hate and communication. Even talking is ridiculous – you have to put things into practice."

Possibly because of this outlook – of determined effort – Bowie is very much against the underground movement. He thinks it started to die two years ago and was doomed from the start because it was a middle-class institution and wasn't really helping the people who needed help.

In fact one track on his album – a seven-minute piece of emotional dynamite called "Cygnet Committee" – sets out his thoughts on this subject. He thinks it will annoy a great many people, and he's right. The title, he says, is because "a cygnet is pretty to look at but is totally helpless", and the lines emote a desperateness throughout with the "hippy" element stating violently "We can FORCE you to be free" and Bowie as narrator voicing his own protest: *"I believe in the power of good – I believe in the state of love…"*

"The whole hippy thing was ridiculous. Mainly middle-class kids rebelling against their parents. They aren't under-privileged when they can afford to buy kaftans and clothes made of expensive materials. It's the lower classes and the Negroes – they're still the under-privileged of this world."

He does have material possessions – a small blue Fiat and a house called Haddon Hall which he and his affable young record producer, Tony Visconti, and their respective girlfriends are moving into soon. And he manages to live quite comfortably on about £12 a week – a sum he has consistently earned over the past four years.

He is NOT a boring, angry kicking-out young man, even though he says he was rebellious at school because he felt sorry for the teachers who didn't know what they were doing. He IS artistic and he does have enormous empathy with people, so that walking through London he will smile and wave and keep bumping into people he knows.

In fact, he says, most of them are acquaintances more than friends, as he distrusts people. He only likes working with people he knows well and admires – like Visconti – and says he trusted too many people in the past, and frequently got kicked in the teeth for his efforts.

David Bowie is a very difficult person to sum up, to arrange as a psychiatrist might in little sections of motive and result. But one thing is very, very certain: in the future he is going to mean much more to the world than just a name, an ex-mime actor or a leading inhabitant of Beckenham, Kent.

Beckenham will now surge along fine without his active pressure, and he has two good people – Angela and an accountant called Chris – to look after other things so that he can throw more energy into his music.

"Space Oddity" is the first tenuous link in a long chain that will make David Bowie one of the biggest assets, and one of the most important people British music has produced in a long, long time. *PENNY VALENTINE*

FANS OF BOWIE have for years been expecting him to make some proper impact on the music scene. If a reasonable position in the *MM* Top 30 is acceptance, then David has at last broken through with his attractive and highly original single, "Space Oddity".

David is a good-looking young songwriter who first made an impression with his original compositions and a group called The Buzz – or was it The Fuzz? At any rate, he's been floating around the scene, making friends and influencing people, without gaining much kudos.

He has a refreshingly casual attitude towards the pop scene, and is really more concerned with his work in the arts lab movement than his singles.

"I haven't really wanted to make any records for ages," he told me this week. "But people have been on at me to record again, so I went to the studios."

"I have been doing mime for a year and a half – this is my comeback! That first album I did it in 15 minutes for 5s 6d. You could say it was rushed. I got discouraged with pop by the lack of work, and at the time it was all Tamla Motown. I didn't stand much chance doing my style of music.

"I got more interested in theatre and mime. Mime is limited when you start, but I think it's a marvellous medium which requires a lot of concentration on the part of the audience.

"Apart from that, I run an arts lab which is my chief occupation. It's in Beckenham and I think it's the best in the country.

"There isn't one pseud involved. All the people are real – like labourers or bank clerks. It started out as a folk club… arts labs generally have such a bad reputation as pseud places.

"There's a lot of talent in the green belt and there is a load of tripe in Drury Lane. I think the arts lab movement is extremely important and should take over from the youth club concept as a social service.

"The people who come are completely pacifist and we get a lot of co-operation from the police in our area. They are more than helpful. Respect breeds respect. We've got a few greasers who come and a few skinheads who are just as enthusiastic.

"I think a lot of skinheads are better than hippies and the hippy cult is so obviously middle-class and snobbish, which is why the skinheads don't like them.

"The hippies don't know about people – they really don't. They don't know what it's like to see three heavies go after their sister, and all

"A LOT OF SKINHEADS ARE BETTER THAN HIPPIES… THE HIPPY CULT IS SO OBVIOUSLY MIDDLE-CLASS AND SNOBBISH"

London faces: on Kingly St, W1 with model Jan De Souza, 1965

REX FEATURES, REDFERNS/GETTY

John, I'm only dancing: Bowie with Hermione Farthingale in short-lived mixed media group Turquoise, October 1968

the other things that happen in the skinheads' environment.

"Nobody wants the skinheads – the schools don't want them, or the youth clubs, and the arts labs don't want to know them least of all.

"When UFO started, they would never let the mods in and now they are getting their own back and getting more violent.

"We started our lab a few months ago with poets and artists who just came along. It's got bigger and bigger and now we have our own light show and sculptures, etc. And I never knew there were so many sitar players in Beckenham."

"I still don't consider myself a performer," said David, reluctantly returning to the subject of Mr Bowie. "I'm a writer… I really wouldn't like to make singing a full-time occupation.

"The record is based a lot on the film *2001*. It's a mixture of Salvador Dalí, *2001* and The Bee Gees. Really, it's just a record which amuses people."

Since we spoke, David has been asked to join the Humble Pie tour, which is not so surprising as David and Peter Frampton are old friends from Beckenham. "I used to go to school with Peter. I haven't seen him since, and I always remember him being very little." David's current success could mean the start of a whole new career for an extremely talented and likeable person. *CHRIS WELCH*

IT LOOKED like a piece of master planning, but it wasn't. It looked like a monster hit, and it was. David Bowie's "Space Oddity" inspired by a visit to the film *2001* was released just as the world was staying up all night to watch the moon landing.

Like the modest, self-effacing young man he is, David passed the credit on to his record company, but as it was written last November, he can hardly disown his amazing foresight!

"Put it down to luck," he said over the phone from Perth, where he was about to begin a short tour of the Haggisland. "I really am amazed at the success of the record, even though I had confidence in it.

"I've been the male equivalent of the dumb blonde for a few years, and I was beginning to despair of people accepting me for my music.

"It may be fine for a male model to be told he's a great-looking guy, but that doesn't help a singer much, especially now the pretty boy personality cult seems to be on the way out."

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Showbiz was in Bowie's blood, sort of. His father Haywood Jones (who worked in Barnado's promotion department) ran the Lenny The Lion fan club. He met his second wife – and Bowie's mother – Margaret 'Peggy' Burns at The Ritz cinema in Tunbridge Wells in 1947, where she was an usherette.

Much as David takes his songwriting seriously, he is amused by pundits who examine his material looking for hidden meanings even he is totally unaware of. "My songs are all from the heart, and they are wholly personal to me and I would like people to accept them as such.

"I dearly want to be recognised as a writer, but I would ask them not to go too deeply into my songs. As likely as not, there's nothing there but the words and music you hear at one listening.

"I see you've noticed that my songs are seldom about boy and girl relationships. That's because I've never had any traumas with girls.

"I like to think myself a pretty stable person, and I've never had a bad relationship with an intelligent girl. And if a girl isn't intelligent, I don't want to know."

Although David made a very good impression on the recent Humble Pie tour, he maintains he is a songwriter first, and even denies he is a good performer.

"It was my first tour," he told me, "and I never stopped being surprised it even went on. It appeared so badly organised to me, but I suppose everybody knew what CONTINUES OVER»

Bowie in '69: "I ran away from London a while back when people started talking about me..."

they were doing. For me it was nothing near an artistic success, mainly because I was limited to a 20-minute spot, and I ended up accompanying myself after a mix up.

"I was very pleased to see that 'Space Oddity' went down well, I thought the audience would miss the orchestral backing which was on the record.

"I throw myself on the mercy of an audience, and I really need them to respond to me. If they don't, I'm lost. But all the same, I'm determined to be an entertainer... clubs, cabaret, concerts, the lot.

"There is too much false pride within the pop scene, groups and singers decrying cabaret without ever having seen the inside of a northern nightclub.

"I just want to sing to as many people as want to hear me, and I don't care where I do it. Mind you, I refuse to have my hair cut or change my appearance for anybody. I'm quite happy with the way I look, and people will have to accept me the way I am, or not bother at all."

A former commercial artist, David played tenor sax with a modern jazz group, "went through the blues thing," during which time he switched to vocalist, and then he joined a traditional French mime company, where he met and worked with Marc Bolan.

"Marc has been a great influence on me, not so much with his music, but with his attitude to the pop scene. He shuts himself away from the destructive elements, and prefers to get on with his work.

"That's how I intend to be, in fact I ran away from London a while back when people started talking about me, and didn't come back unless it was really vital."

Inevitably, the underground cropped up, and David had some interesting comments on the movement, "I thought when the whole thing started," he said, "that a whole lot of new, musically minded groups were going to appear with some meaningful music and try and spread it around. Well, we've got the music, and most of it is very good, too, but I can't figure out the attitude of so many of the underground groups.

"It seems to me that they have expanded their own personal little scene to a certain extent, and then they stop, content to play to the converted. That doesn't get them anywhere, and in the end both the audiences and the groups will get fed up with the same faces and places.

"A lot is said about musical snobbery with the fans, but the groups are just as bad. For some reason, even the words 'entertainer' and 'cabaret' make them shudder."

Obviously, having a hit record – and being able to command the money that goes with it – is going to make a few changes to David's life, not least of all on his bank balance.

He seems to have made a good start already. "I've bought a big car, and a nice little house which needs a lot more time and some money spent on it before it will be as I want it.

"I suppose other little things will crop up as time goes on. At the moment, I'm more concerned with remaining a 22-year-old, or even going back a year to 21.

"This business might keep you young mentally but I feel almost middle-aged physically. I often regret not leading a more normal teenage life. From the time I was about 16, I never kicked a football over a common with my mates, I haven't had to chat up a girl like an ordinary teenager for ages, and believe it or not, I miss it.

"I have to try and figure out if a girl knows who I am and whether she wants me for what I am or my name. It's a more difficult problem than it sounds, but as I was saying, I haven't had much trouble with girls, touch wood."

The immediate future for David Bowie looks bright, with as much live work as he wants, an LP on release this week, and even the prospect of his own TV show.

But the usual pressing worry about follow-ups hasn't caught up with David yet. "Follow-up?" he queried, "but the first one's still alive at the moment. Actually I haven't even thought about it.

"I'm not sure if I've got a suitable song for another single, but even if I have, I don't want to be one of those singers whose career depends on hit singles, and they are virtually dead for six months of the year.

"I hope to get some free time to do some writing when I return from Scotland, but even then, I can't write just because I've got the time. But it's a bit early in life for all my ideas to have dried up, isn't it, so I suppose I'll come up with something."

At the moment, David seems to be the sort of person much needed in pop: full of original thoughts, a willingness to work, a hatred of the herd, drugs scene and class distinction in music, and, common sense enough not to let the fame and adulation surely coming his way, turn his head.

I'm sure he has been around long enough to withstand the pressures, and if he can't, he'll be wise enough to run. *GORDON COXHILL*

ALPHA

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Bowie advertised the Stylophone in 1969, following the success of "Space Oddity". He also appeared in an ad for Luv, 'the pop ice cream' in 1967 and a Japanese ad for *sake* in 1980. A 2003 Vittel TV ad showed him sharing a house with his past personae, including a CGI Diamond Dog, played by a lookalike. See them on YouTube!

"THIS BUSINESS MIGHT KEEP YOU YOUNG MENTALLY, BUT I FEEL ALMOST MIDDLE-AGED PHYSICALLY..."

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UNCUT 13P

RELEASE DATE 04 | NOVEMBER | 1969

DAVID BOWIE/ SPACE ODDITY

Commencing countdown, engines on... Alongside the Arts Lab folk songs, there are intimations of rock glories to come. *By John Lewis*

IN THE YEARS between his Deram debut of 1967 and its follow-up, David Bowie chalked up an impressively varied CV. He acted in a BBC play (*The Pistol Shot*) and an avant-garde short film (*The Image*); appeared as a clown in a theatrical mime show (*Pierrot In Turquoise*); auditioned unsuccessfully for a part in the musical *Hair* and sundry other West End productions; starred in an ice cream ad (directed by Ridley Scott); made a bizarre promotional film showcasing songs from his first album (*Love You Till Tuesday*); and recorded a (still unreleased) song-cycle about a mentally ill teenager who hosts a suicide party (the semi-mythical Ernie Johnson).

Acting, or perhaps cabaret, still seemed Bowie's likely calling. Even his musical activities at the time – hosting a glorified folk club called The Beckenham Arts Lab and fronting a hessian-and-lace acoustic trio called Feathers – suggested a career in folk, not rock.

But while two Bowie mentors at the time (manager Kenneth Pitt and mime artist Lindsay Kemp) pushed him towards cabaret, two others (publicist Calvin Mark Lee and producer/bassist Tony Visconti) were nudging him elsewhere. In a career speckled with unlikely influences, from Tommy Steele to Bruce Springsteen, Bowie's key inspiration for moving rockwards came in the form of Simon & Garfunkel. In particular, it's the trippy, childlike, harmony-laden, folk-with-a-backbeat sound of 1968's *Bookends* that provides the template for much of *David Bowie* – not least its lead single.

Bowie's first great single has, retrospectively, been painted as an attempt to cash in on the Moon landings of July 1969, but "Space Oddity" takes its cue from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and was part of his live sets at the Arts Lab from late 1968. Bowie and his accompanist John Hutchinson would perform the song about a doomed astronaut on 12-string acoustics, with Bowie multi-tasking on a Stylophone (apparently a present from friend and rival Marc Bolan). An early version even features on the *Love You Till Tuesday* film.

Tony Visconti, who ended up helming the rest of the album, turned down the chance to produce "Space Oddity", seeing it as another "Laughing Gnome"-style novelty single.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"A bit Dylan-ish, is Britain's David Bowie and his voice, a little more tuneful than Bob's, has a haunting appeal. He also plays a 12-string guitar, Stylophone, kalimba and electric chord organ..."

ALLEN EVANS, NME, DECEMBER 20, 1969

Fortunately, Visconti's replacement, Gus Dudgeon, saw potential in Bowie's acoustic sketch and set about transforming it into a symphonic suite, exquisitely orchestrated by Paul Buckmaster, with Pentangle's Terry Cox adding a jazzy subtlety to the military drum patterns.

The single wasn't actually a hit around the time of the Moon landings. The BBC, despite using it as incidental music for some of their NASA coverage, thought its tragic narrative distasteful while Neil Armstrong and co had still not safely returned to earth, and didn't play it on the radio. Instead it lingered for several months outside the Top 100 until re-entering the chart in September 1969, eventually peaking at No 5. Bowie had the breakthrough single he wanted, but he spent the next three years desperately trying to prove that he was not a one-hit wonder.

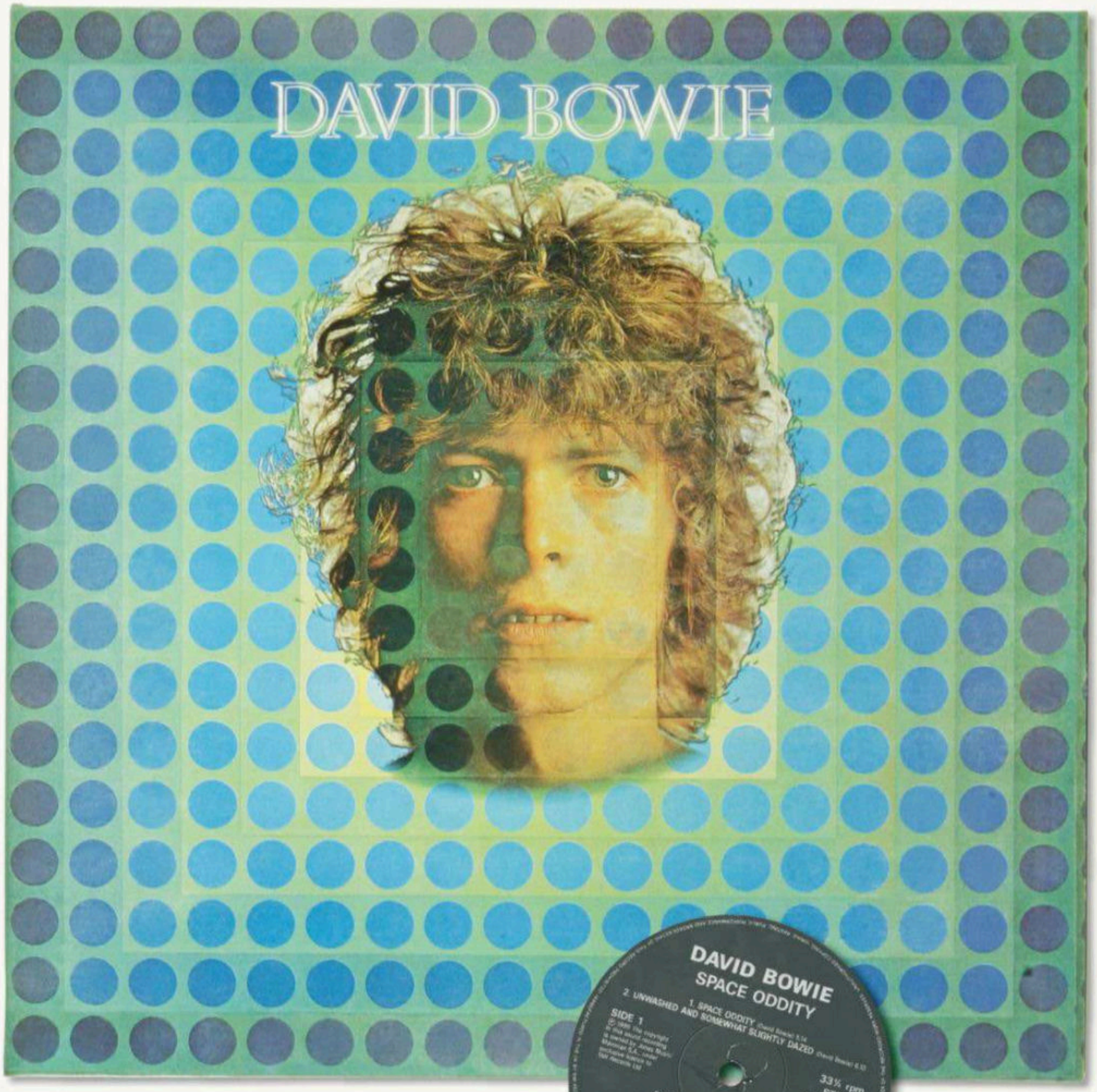
The album's second track, "Unwashed And Somewhat Slightly Dazed", starts with a lovely, limpid 12-string guitar that provides a sonic link with "Space Oddity". But, after 40 seconds, the drums kick in, and the song acquires a Bo Diddley chug and a melody line that recalls Dylan's "Stuck Inside Of Mobile With The Memphis Blues Again". It is the first time Bowie truly rocks, with the added frisson of him declaring his freak status (*"I'm a phallus in pigtails/And there's blood on my nose"*). Later, "God Knows I'm Good" reprises the Bo Diddley guitar figure, transforming the tale of an elderly shoplifter into a parable. "Janine" is another orthodox rocker, and a tantalising exploration of split personality (*"If you take an axe to me/ You'll kill another man/Not me at all"*).

The album also features Bowie's first genuine

TRACKMARKS | David Bowie/ Space Oddity

1. **Space Oddity** ★★★★★
2. **Unwashed And Somewhat Slightly Dazed** ★★★★
3. **Don't Sit Down** ★★★ **[not on the 1972 reissue]**
4. **Letter To Hermione** ★★★★
5. **Cygnet Committee** ★★★★★
6. **Janine** ★★★★
7. **An Occasional Dream** ★★★
8. **Wild Eyed Boy From Freecloud** ★★★
9. **God Knows I'm Good** ★★★★
10. **Memory Of A Free Festival** ★★★★

RELEASED: As David Bowie (retitled Space Oddity in 1972) November 4, 1969
LABEL: Phillips (UK, as David Bowie) Mercury (US, renamed Man Of Words/ Man Of Music)
PRODUCED BY: Tony Visconti ("Space Oddity" produced by Gus Dudgeon)
RECORDED AT: Trident Studios, London
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, 12-string guitar, Stylophone, Kalimba); Rick Wakeman (Mellotron, electric harpsichord, keyboards); Terry Cox (drums); Tim Renwick (electric guitar); Keith Christmas (acoustic guitar) Mick Wayne (guitar); Tony Visconti (bass guitar, flute, recorder); Herbie Flowers (bass); Benny Marshall and Friends (harmonica); Paul Buckmaster (cello).
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 17; US 16 (on reissue as Space Oddity)



love song, "Letter To Hermione", a pretty, poetic homage to the dancer Hermione Farthingale who spent much of 1968 living with Bowie. She is the subject of another lovelorn ballad, "An Occasional Dream", which celebrates how they "*talked with our eyes/Of all the sweetness in our lives*".

On first release in November '69, one can see how ballads like these must have seemed like remnants from the Summer Of Love, particularly in such a fast-moving pop landscape. Ironically, the album made much more sense when it was reissued three years later to cash in on Ziggy mania. Rebadged as *Space Oddity*, its sleeve featured a disingenuously 'new' portrait of Bowie, but then many of its songs seemed more comfortable coming from the mouth of Ziggy than from the suburban folk singer of 1969.

"Memory Of A Free Festival" (written about a Beckenham Arts Lab festival of August '69, but spookily prescient of the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre, at which Bowie also performed) both celebrates the rave ethos ("*Oh, to capture just one drop of all the ecstasy that swept that afternoon*") while mocking it as slyly as Pulp's "Sorted For E's And Wizz" would do 25 years later ("*We claimed the very source of joy ran through/It didn't, but it seemed that way*"). Likewise "Cygnet Committee", an intricate epic narrated by a countercultural messiah, made more sense from the Bowie of 1972, especially when he bitterly recounts how his adoring congregation have sapped his powers ("*I gave them life/I gave them all/They drained my very soul*"). And "Wild Eyed Boy From Freecloud", which recounts the last moments of a condemned man, harks back to Bowie's early melodramas, but also projects towards the more theatrical Thin White Duke. It remained in his live set for years.

The album has been re-released four times on CD, the last edition featuring a whole disc of interviews, offcuts, demos, b-sides and alternate mixes. Both Bowie and Visconti have since said that they were unhappy with the sound of the initial LP: Bowie would much rather the entire album sounded like the heavier, two-part 1970 single version of "Memory Of A Free Festival", with Mick Ronson and Woody Woodmansey on board. But it's the 1969 version, in which Bowie's voice is accompanied only by a ghostly harmonium drone for the first four minutes, that embodies this album's charm. As an attempt to spike boho folk with avant-garde pop, it's an experiment that lesser artists might have eked an entire career from.

RELEASE DATE 10 | APRIL | 1971

THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD

Bereavement, insanity, a world in turmoil, and a frisson of glam. A last confession before the mask goes on. *By Rob Young*

"THE LYRICS MOSTLY mirror the current unrest in the world, and David sings them in a rather hysterical voice, accompanying himself on a wild, vibrant guitar…" The *New Musical Express*' judgment on Bowie's third solo album was quite generous, but in the succeeding years *The Man Who Sold The World* has frequently been glossed over in the Bowie canon, sitting uncomfortably, but logically, in his progress from enlightened Arts Lab guru and mime artiste to glam god (though that transition continued on to the much more accessible *Hunky Dory*).

Like, for example, *Young Americans*, it represents a set of ideas and a musical style Bowie explored to their utmost on the one album before moving onwards. But it also features an embryonic Spiders From Mars, with Mick Ronson and Woody Woodmansey, and producer Tony Visconti himself setting a fuzzy, roughcut bass template that Trevor Bolder would pick up the following year.

These are ambitious anthems from the 24-year-old Bowie, full of unexpected rambling twists and turns, flexing his arms from the previous year's folk-rock towards the electric Bacchanals of *Ziggy Stardust*, and to some extent shadowing his nemesis/amanuensis, Marc Bolan, who was making a similar hippy-to-glam transition at exactly the same time (Bowie apes/claims allegiance with Bolan's eldritch bleat on the T.Rex boogie of "Black Country Rock). *The Man Who Sold The World*, then, is a workshopping of new ideas, a testing of harder rock waters, and a purging of ideological baggage that would have no place in the chart assault of 1972 and beyond.

Infamously, the album's original UK sleeve – photographed by Keith MacMillan, aka Marcus Keef – featured the artist in that dress; one which had shocked and disturbed the burghers of San Francisco on a recent promotional trip when he wore velveteen frocks in the streets. That trip – on which he played a string of college gigs and took questions from the floor after each song – helped him clarify certain issues about his self-presentation, overcome any inhibitions he may have had about presenting a face of sexual ambiguity, and consider his work in a theatrical light.

"What the music says may be serious," he confided to local reporter John Mendelson, "but as a medium it should not be questioned, analysed, or taken so seriously. I think it should be tarted up, made into a prostitute, a parody of itself. It should be the clown, the Pierrot medium. The music is the mask the message wears – music is the Pierrot and I, the performer, am the message." The same profile mentions his desire to appear onstage as Cleopatra in make-up and 1930s-style costumes. This is, of course, the age of the first real stirring of explicit androgyny in pop music, of *Performance*, and the Aquarian Age flibbertigibbets of *Hair*.

In his Beckenham Arts Lab phase, Bowie's songs had spoken of a faith in the young generation to create a new society. *The Man Who Sold The World* is a more cynical, embittered, even violent piece. Bowie's earlier dreams of a new race of enlightened young beings changing the world have darkened on *The Man Who Sold The World*, shading into "*the thought just occurred that we're nobody's children, after all*" ("After All"), or the "*Guardians of a loveless isle*" described on "The Supermen", condemned to an existence of "*solemn perverse serenity… no pain, no joy… Nightmare dreams no mortal man could hold*". The supermen have turned savage, just like the vigilante narrator of

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"David Bowie has come out of hiding and given us *The Man Who Sold The World*. It has been available for some time in the States and it's easy to see why it has been selling so well… 'The Supermen' in particular shows how well the music fits the mood of the words and Bowie's clear, distinctive voice."

DISC AND MUSIC ECHO, APRIL 10, 1971

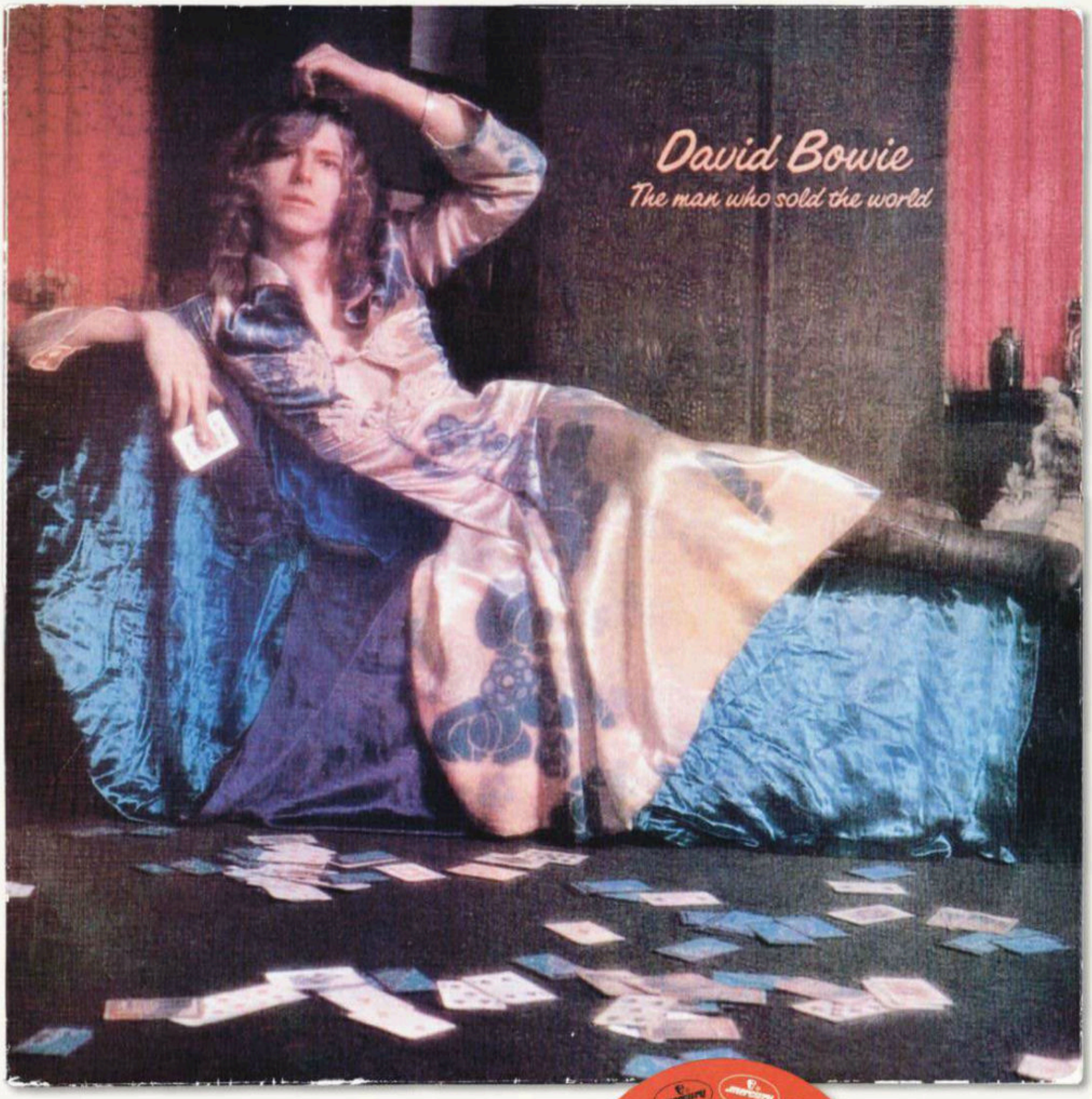
"There's a bit of horror in 'All The Madmen', some quiet folk on 'After All' and much drive in 'Width Of A Circle', over eight minutes and the reason for David posing in drag on the sleeve…"

ALLEN EVANS, NME, APRIL 3, 1971

TRACKMARKS | The Man Who Sold The World

1. **The Width Of A Circle** ★★★★★
2. **All The Madmen** ★★★★★
3. **Black Country Rock** ★★★★
4. **After All** ★★★
5. **Running Gun Blues** ★★★
6. **Saviour Machine** ★★★
7. **She Shook Me Cold** ★★
8. **The Man Who Sold The World** ★★★
9. **The Supermen** ★★★★

RELEASED: April 1971 (November 4, 1970 in US)
LABEL: Phillips/Mercury
PRODUCED BY: Tony Visconti
RECORDED AT: Trident and Advision Studios, London, UK
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, Stylophone); Mick Ronson (guitar, vocals); Mick Woodmansey (drums, percussion); Tony Visconti (electric bass, piano, guitar); Ralph Mace (Moog synthesiser)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 26 (on reissue); US 105



"Running Gun Blues", a nasty lump of churning rock that describes a killer's-eye view of a multiple slaying.

In an early presentiment of Bowie's later sexual ambiguities, "She Shook Me Cold" masochistically recounts being raped by a woman on a hillside. A similar black cloud hovers over "Saviour Machine", a sci-fi allegory about a supercomputer that first solves mankind's problems, then becomes bored and disillusioned with the world that is left and begs to be sacrificed.

The significant background event was the death of Bowie's father Haywood Jones (known as John) in 1969. "I used to have periods, weeks on end, when I just couldn't cope any more," Bowie told an interviewer in 1971. "I felt so depressed, and I really felt so aimless, and this torrential feeling of 'what's it all for anyway? A lot of [*the album*] went through that period."

"The Width Of A Circle" – a narrative recounting a journey to self-knowledge – makes a bravado opening statement, showing off allusive lyrics and unleashing the torrents of Ronson's Les Paul. In this eight-minute progressive rock piece, as twisting and exploratory as Roy Harper's contemporaneous *Stormcock*, the narrator finds himself "*a monster*" grown lethargic by following false gods, and decides to takes a Nietzschean leap into the abyss. It's followed by "All The Madmen", a chilling catechism of anger and despair triggered by the incarceration of his half-brother Terry in the notorious Cane Hill mental hospital in Coulsdon, Surrey. (The asylum's administration block appears on the cover of the US version of the album, with its cartoon sleeve).

The precarious relationship with insanity that would fuel the tempestuous changes of the 1970s starts here, with the announcement that: "*I'd rather stay here/With all the madmen/Than perish with the sadman roaming free*". For this album really represents the moment when Bowie – digesting his experiences with Lindsay Kemp, et al – decided the mask worked better than naked confession; that the spiritual trappings of pop culture thus far were so much theatrical drapery; and that from now on, the costume department would be the engine room of success.

"I WROTE A SONG ABOUT A SPACESHIP AND EVERYONE EXPECTED ME TO BE SOME KIND OF EXPERT..."

"Space Oddity" has been and gone, and Bowie is starting to look like a one-hit wonder. What next, then? Domestic bliss in Beckenham, some promising new bandmates, and a provocative taste in outfits. "I thought," he says, "the dress was beautiful..."

TAKEN FROM
DISC
20/03/1971

ON FEBRUARY 14, 1970, David Bowie was voted Disc's Brightest Hope that year. Now, one year and 34 days later, we find out what went wrong.

When David "Bangers" Bowie came to meet me from the 2.40 from Blackfriars to Beckenham in Kent, I unguardedly climbed into his incredibly ancient mad old Riley. And as the car ambled casually from the station's yard, I remarked that David's appearance had changed considerably since his brief days of glory with his single "Space Oddity". His hair has grown longer and he was wearing blue velvet trousers with a woolly blue dressing gown-cum-coat.

We stopped briefly to pick up some shopping in the town and jammed a sixpence in the engine to keep it turning over. Then we bombed off again. I held on to the door as it appeared to be on the point of dropping off.

"It won't come off," I was assured. "It's just a bit loose. If you think this is old, you wait 'til you see the house and the rest of my old cars."

David and his lady live in a beautiful Victorian house which even has turrets on the roof and a gallery running around the first floor inside the house. It overlooks a kind of banqueting hall. There's also a huge garden, the domain of a very lazy King Charles spaniel.

Spread out on the floor of one room were numerous tapes of songs from an album to be released here in April, called *The Man Who Sold The World*. It's already selling well in the States where Three Dog Night have covered three of the tracks. Bowie also has material for a new album he is working on and demos of songs he has sold to other artists.

Herman [Peter Noone]'s solo single "Oh You Pretty Things", was written by him, as were other tracks bought by producer Mickie Most, a song for the Sir Douglas Quintet and one for Gene Vincent.

"Its funny how I suddenly seem to have taken off as a songwriter, but this is what living down here has done for me. I'm wrapped up in my friends and include them in the CONTINUES OVER»

GETTY IMAGES

Bowie's first US performance, at the LA home of attorney Paul Feigen, February 1971

Chez Bowie: Haddon Hall, Southend Road, Beckenham, April, 1971. Below: The Arnold Corns single, and Bowie with Rudolph Valentino on the cover of *Curious* magazine

songs. One of my songs, 'Rupert, The Riley', is about the car."

The Riley is one of four cars, in various stages of working order, including a huge old wedding car with plush velvet seats, soon to have a stereo system installed.

As well as looking after his own album career, David is producing two solo singers and a group called Arnold Corns, who were signed up to B&C Records just as I sat listening to their demo single, "Moonage Daydream". It really is incredible and bodes well for an album they hope to do soon. Three of the band are schoolboys and the lead singer calls himself Rudolph Valentino.

David is also producing and writing for a solo singer called Geoff Alexander who sounds rather like The Band's Robbie Robertson; and also has an old friend from art college, Calvin James, who designed the sleeves for the first T.Rex album and Gentle Giant. James' single is out on Bell next month.

Since "Space Oddity", David has left the singles market himself to concentrate on albums. "I became disillusioned after 'Space Oddity'. The album was released at the same time and did absolutely nothing. No-one even bothered to review it and I'm convinced that some of the tracks were really good. I just decided to leave London and come to live down here. In fact, the only thing that gave me faith again was being asked to go across to America. If I'm into making it in records, I'll have to go and live there."

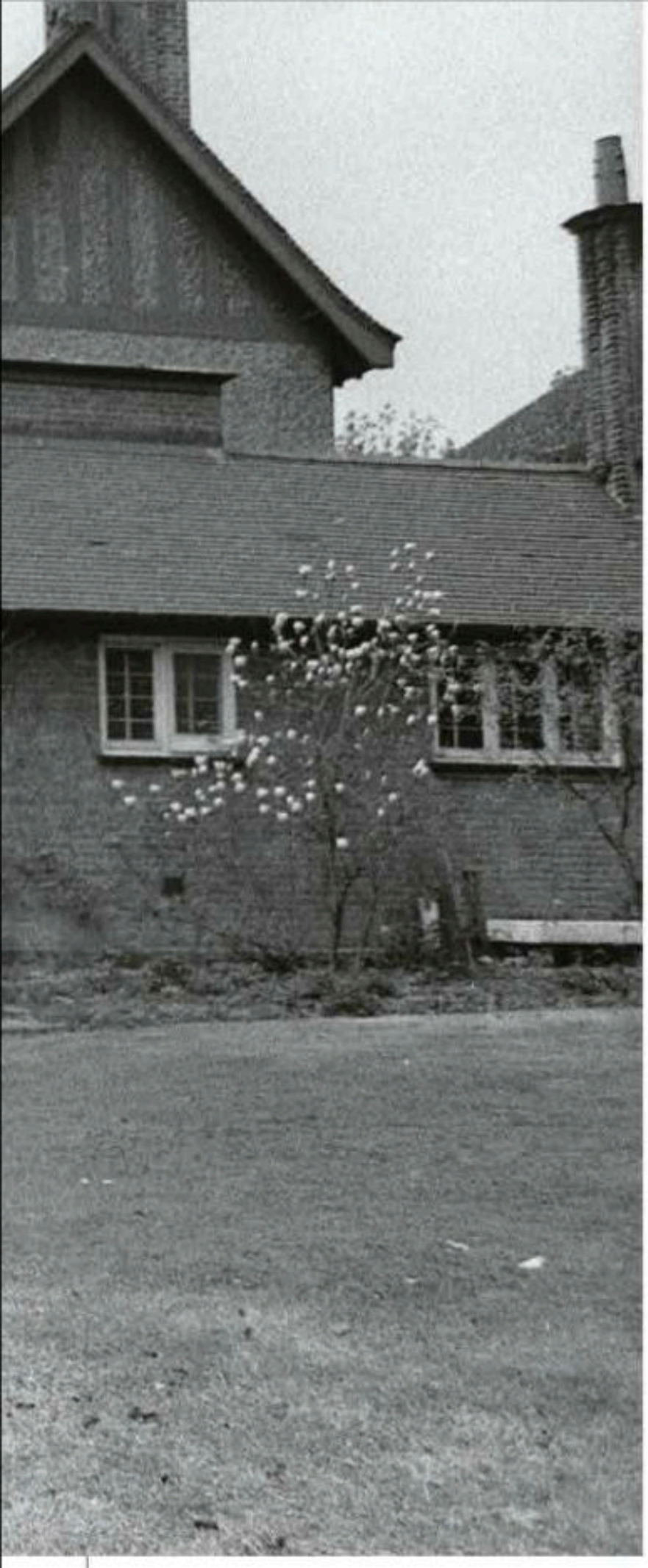
David has just returned from a three-month stay in America. As he didn't have a work permit, he couldn't do any gigs, but went round universities talking to students about the album and doing radio interviews.

"In America, although you might not believe it, I'm regarded as an underground artist. They know nothing about my singles and see 'Space Oddity' as just as an LP track. But in America, music is a communicating force; people all relate to it. Besides, there isn't much bread to be made here at the moment."

A frenzied search of the house for a copy of the new LP was fruitless but David talked about the talent of the two musicians who played on it. They are Mick Ronson and Woody

"BRITAIN DOESN'T KNOW WHAT REVOLUTION IS. THE PEOPLE SHOULD BE FIGHTING AGAINST THE COMMON MARKET..."

MIRRORPIX



TAKEN FROM
MELODY MAKER
17/04/1971

SO THERE WAS this geezer dressed up in ladies' clothes and I fought "Cor blimey," I fought. But it turned out, he was quite a straight geezer, know what I mean, like?

Frankly, it is somewhat difficult to know what David Bowie means. You see, he is tasting the fruits of life, not unlike the Prophet Ezekiel who, you will recall, spoke in his sermon at the vineyards of the tribe of Ishgosh: "Go forth and have ye a good laugh."

David means no harm when he poses in a gorgeous gown on the cover of his latest LP. "It's a pretty dress," he says simply. "I had to go to Texas, so I thought I'd test the reaction."

At least one cowhand threatened to shoot him, but courteously explained that the laws of the United States somewhat frowned upon the extermination of Englishmen, even those clad in gals' clobber. It was the only reason he could conceive to restrain himself from drilling David with lead.

Mind you, dressing in drag is not entirely new to the pop scene. The Rolling Stones had a go a few years back to publicise one of their albums, and there was that Welsh rock'n'roll revivalist and inveterate wearer of ladies' wigs, Dal the Hair.

When Bowie, the man who hit with the clever and unusual "Space Oddity" a couple of years ago, appeared in my local boozer this week, he was not, I hasten to emphasise, garbed in anything more unusual than a blue wrap (not unlike the Lewisham Council public bath robe), a white see-thru blouse, and spacious slacks, better suited to a buxom land girl of the type who ensured our carrot supply during the recent Anglo-German conflict, than might be needed to accommodate his essentially spare frame.

"What ho Dave," I burped cheerfully, "Wot have you bin up to lately?" I winked knowingly, downed three pints of strong ale and playfully punched a passing dock-worker in the mouth.

David, ashen of hue, and in obvious need of an oxygen tent, ordered a glass of strained carrot juice, kicked a nearby lumberjack on the shins and smiled.

He also talked about his past. His new album. And about the portrait on the cover, which has already intrigued sheetmetal workers and bargees from Newcastle to Glasgow.

"I was in the depths of despair then," he says, talking about the days of his hit. "It was nearly two years ago and I don't forget about it, because it was an important period and I'm still living off it! It helped me to be accepted as a songwriter and now I've had songs accepted by Three Dog Night and even Gene Vincent. Mickie Most heard a song I wrote and although I really wanted Leon Russell to sing it, I suppose Herman has done it quite well. It's called 'Oh You Pretty Things'. I don't know if Peter Herman knows what it means. It's all about Homo Superior. Herman goes heavy. He's going to be a slightly more adult entertainer. I don't know what that phrase means. I just want to be an all round entertainer." [*laughs*]

Just what happened after Bowie's hit and why did he sink into renewed obscurity?

"It's very weird. My father died and a week later I had a hit record. The juxtaposition was like a pantomime, a comic tragedy. Since that time I have had a complete change of management and have started writing again.

"My new LP is actually a year and a half old. But I've got my next one in the can and another half completed. I went to America a few weeks ago to promote this one, and I was going to Texas, I wore a dress. One guy pulled a gun and called me a fag. But I thought the dress was beautiful."

David revealed that at one time he was in danger of becoming bitter and twisted. "But I'm definitely happy now. I'm very content – which is worrying. I've become optimistic about things and I never used to be.

"My writing was schizoid, but it's much more simple now. I've been working with Terry Cox of Pentangle and getting a group together to go on the road. I haven't done that for years, and I'm terrified. All the people I want are with other bands at the moment, and I don't want to start breaking them up! But when The Strawbs are free, I'd like to use Rick Wakeman and the guitarist from High Tide.

"I feel I'd like to perform again, but I don't like the club atmosphere quite honestly… I'd prefer to work in the theatre. I prefer to work with a proscenium arch. I got very involved in mixed media once and it nearly broke me. I thought of working at the Gaumont [*State Cinema*] Kilburn. That's a super theatre.

"I used to play tenor sax with the Gene Pitney band. God, it was awful." David fluttered across varying subjects with disarming illogicality. "I talk a lot and say nothing," he revealed pleasantly. "I'm very scared to comment in a song now, since 'Space Oddity'. I just wrote a song about a spaceship and everybody expected me to be some kind of expert."

David has been waiting in the wings as a songwriter for some years since his memorable first album, distinguished by unusual songs and a vocal style with faint overtones of Anthony Newley.

Married, busy and with a future in music brighter than ever, David is still perverse enough to want to wave a pair of knickers in the face of society. Will they duck him in the village pond? Will they hang him high?

"Oh, the LP cover is purely decorative. It's just theatre. I don't know… England is tolerant."

So yer see, Guy, it's just the way of these arty types. If he comes down your boozer looking like that, just stand him a Guinness, eschew violence and the world will continue to spin quite comfortably on its axis. *CHRIS WELCH*

Woodmansey, from a blues band in Hull. Although they felt they could make it if they teamed up as a permanent band, they returned to their group at home.

The songs are much heavier than one would expect and David thinks they were using a Moog, long before many of the groups who use them now. The LP was actually recorded a year ago, so David has rather lost interest in it now, and legal hassles delayed its release here.

An American review of the album mentions a tinge of bitterness, but David disagrees. "I'm not bitter. I was disillusioned at first, but that went long ago. I'd like to be an album artist in this country, but really I'm very happy."

I could see why as we walked round the garden, inspecting the gazebo. The country has been the means of David having time to write his songs.

Although he has some strong feelings about politics he never includes them in his numbers. "Britain just doesn't know what revolution is. The people should be fighting against the Common Market but they won't until it's too late."

It was getting late, and it seemed only fitting that the accelerator should fall out of the car as David drove me to the station.

ROSALIND RUSSELL

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

As well as "…Pretty Things", Peter Noone recorded Bowie's "Right On Mother", for the b-side of 1971's "Walnut Whirl". Bowie also provided songs for Ronnie Hilton ("The Laughing Gnome") The Beatstalkers ("Silver Treetop School For Boys"), Oscar ("Over The Wall We Go") and Billy Fury ("Silly Boy Blue").

RELEASE DATE 17 | DECEMBER | 1971

HUNKY DORY

Ch-Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes! The flamboyant, Nietzschean freak creates his first masterpiece. *By Stephen Troussé*

LIKE MANY OF his best records, *Hunky Dory* captures a David Bowie in transition, in a moment of becoming. But perhaps because it was the first time he really worked out the magic combination, first dreamed up such an authoritative version of himself, it's easy to see that it might just be his definitive album. Bowie famously wrote "Life On Mars" in revenge, or out of frustration, for failing to have written "My Way" (when his lame translation of the original "Comme d'Habitude" was passed over in favour of Paul Anka's). But it's actually "Changes", first track, Side One, that is his enduring signature tune – the one that will play over the news bulletin career montages when he takes his final curtain.

The cover captures the moment immaculately. If you study Brian Ward's full shoot from 1971, Bowie doesn't look too different from the Beckenham Bacall draped across the cover of *The Man Who Sold The World*. Yet the final pic, cropped tight to a headshot, hair pulled back, and delicately colourised by George Underwood, suggests a timelord caught mid-regeneration, on his way from pre-Raphaelite princeling to Warhol icon (via expressionist starlet). It's as though the colour and contrast on his career are being dialled up (on the way to Mick Rock's bleached out 1973 video for "Life On Mars?"), and the picture has caught the precise moment black and white turns to colour, between Kansas and Oz, Haddon Hall and the Factory floor.

It was a triumph of the will. During the sessions for *The Man Who Sold The World* Tony Visconti had grown exasperated with Bowie's slackness, his mooning around with Angie as studio time ran out and vocals remained unrecorded. By contrast *Hunky Dory* had been painstakingly plotted, worked out alone at home on piano as Bowie patiently waited for new manager Tony DeFries to extricate him from his deal with Mercury.

Bowie had made his first trip across the Atlantic in February on a short promo tour, and maybe it was the sheer scale, madness and wonder of the USA at the hungover turn of the decades that spurred his ambition, gave him a real taste of a world/stage larger than post-hippy London. The magnificent, magisterial "Life On Mars?" is the song of someone humiliated by the gap between Technicolor spectacle and suburban sunken dreams, and inevitably evokes Bowie's own failure to launch, the "*million dead-end streets*" he'd dawdled down since the countdown of "Space Oddity" back in 1969.

In this respect the supremely self-confident pizzazz of the songcraft and arrangements, the very album title itself, are extreme wishful thinking, putting a brave face on what are still some very troubled, conflicted songs. "Oh! You Pretty Things" was superficially perky enough for Peter Noone to cover and take to No 12 as his solo debut single, yet the couplet "*Look out my window and what do I see?/A crack in the sky and a hand reaching down to me*" seems to allude to Bowie's half-brother Terry and his incipient mental illness. The song's bipolar combination of flighty, flippant piano (fabulously handled by Rick Wakeman, pretty much the lead musician on the record), flamboyant arrangements (courtesy of Mick Ronson), and freaky, Nietzschean lyrics characterises the album as a whole.

Even the cheeriest songs on the album can't quite escape this shadow. "Kooks", inspired by the birth of Bowie's son, and written as a kind of music hall pastiche of Neil Young balladry, is one of the funniest, most touching songs about parenthood ever written, but even here, though made light of ("*I'm not much cop at punching other people's dads…*"), there's the lingering subtext of inherited madness.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"It's very possible that this will be the most important album from an emerging artist in 1972, because he's not following trends – he's setting them."
DANNY HOLLOWAY, NME, JANUARY 29, 1972

"*Hunky Dory* is not only the best album Bowie has ever done, it's also the most inventive piece of songwriting to have appeared on record for a considerable time."
MICHAEL WATTS, MELODY MAKER, JANUARY 15, 1972

TRACKMARKS | Hunky Dory

1. **Changes** ★★★★★
2. **Oh! You Pretty Things** ★★★★
3. **Eight Line Poem** ★★★
4. **Life On Mars** ★★★★★
5. **Kooks** ★★★★
6. **Quicksand** ★★★★
7. **Fill Your Heart** ★★★
8. **Andy Warhol** ★★★★
9. **Song For Bob Dylan** ★★★
10. **Queen Bitch** ★★★★★
11. **The Bewlay Brothers** ★★★★★

RELEASED: December 17, 1971
LABEL: RCA
PRODUCED BY: Ken Scott and David Bowie
RECORDED AT: Trident Studios, London
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, alto and tenor saxophone, piano); Mick Ronson (guitar, vocals, Mellotron, arrangements); Rick Wakeman (piano); Trevor Bolder (bass, trumpet); Mick Woodmansey (drums)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 3; US 93

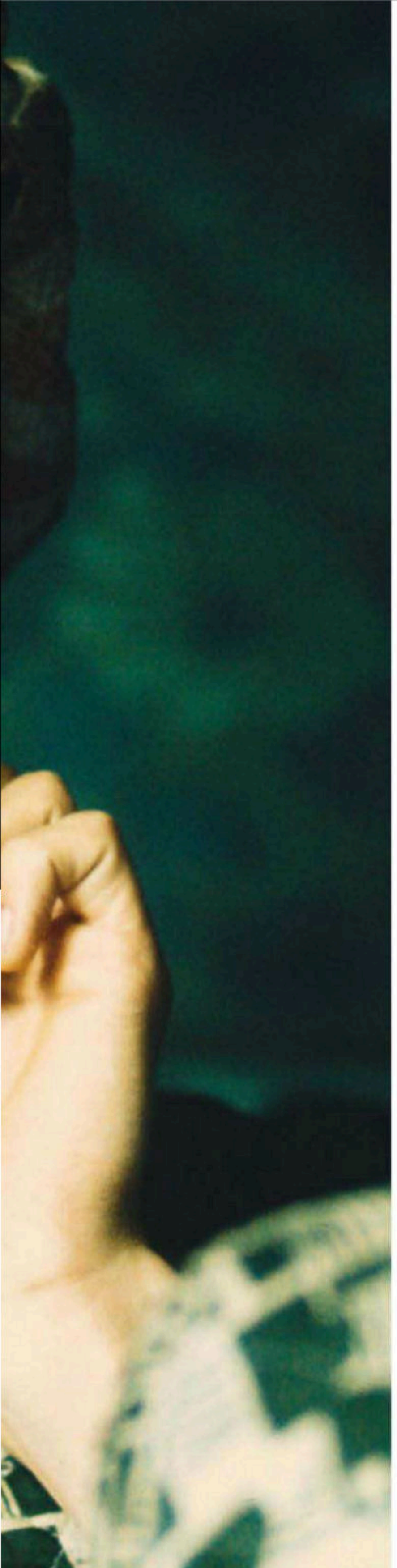
Similarly the giddy and gay "Fill Your Heart", a faithful version of the Biff Rose song, teeters on the brink of Tiny Tim hysteria.

The shadows become overwhelming on the songs that close each side. "Quicksand", a bad-dream sequence namechecking Crowley, Himmler and Churchill, gilded with Ronson acoustic guitars multitracked by Ken Scott, fresh from engineering George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass*, finishes with Bowie desparately singing "*I'm sinking in the quicksand of my thought/And I ain't got the power anymore.*" "The Bewlay Brothers", meanwhile, ends the album in a stunning fever dream of addled imagery and pitchshifted, varispeed vocals imploring "*please come away, just for a day*", the laughing gnome returning as bad-trip harbinger of insanity.

It's one of the most disturbing songs in the Bowie canon, but it ultimately feels cathartic rather than submissive. The whole second side of the album feels like Bowie reckoning with his idols and demons, toying with combinations until the tumblers align, working out how to compose himself. "Andy Warhol" was originally written for singer, actress and Angie Bowie's pal Dana Gillespie when Bowie briefly fancied himself as a Svengali. It develops the inkling of emulating Andy, not by passing through the screen to become the spectacle, but becoming the screen itself. "Song For Bob Dylan" addresses another hero, accusing him of betraying the kids by producing "*the same old painted lady*" rather than the old poetry, though Bowie was beginning to understand how rock could be

caked in make-up, could become the "pierrot artform" and still tell a truth.

Best of all, though, is "Queen Bitch": as Chris O'Leary of online blog *Pushing Ahead Of The Dame* puts it, "Not so much an imitation of the VU as much as an utter annexation of their sound." Ronson's slashing riff already seems to be gearing up for *Ziggy Stardust*, and when Bowie yelps "*She's so swishy in her satin and tat/In her frock coat and bipperty-bopperty hat/Oh God, I could do better than that*," he seems to be addressing the remnants of his previous incarnation, ditching his hippy gladrags, girding himself for the full transformation. The old David Bowie would have to make way for the homo superior.



"I'M GOING TO BE HUGE, AND IT'S QUITE FRIGHTENING IN A WAY..."

1972, and Bowie grasps that his time has finally come. MICHAEL WATTS is seduced by the self-styled "cosmic yob", as Bowie discusses *Hunky Dory* and his apparently flexible sexuality. Better make way for the homo superior!

TAKEN FROM MELODY MAKER 22/01/1972

DAVID BOWIE, rock's swishiest outrage: a self-confessed lover of effeminate clothes, Bowie, who has hardly performed in public since his "Space Oddity" hit of three years ago, is coming back in super-style. In the States critics have hailed him as the new Bob Dylan, and his tour-de-force album, *Hunky Dory*, looks set to enter the British charts. "Changes", the single taken from it, was Tony Blackburn's Record Of The Week recently. David will be appearing, suitably spiffy and with his three-piece band, at the Lanchester Festival on February 3.

Even though he wasn't wearing silken gowns right out of Liberty and his blond hair no longer fell wavily past his shoulders, David Bowie was looking yummy.

He'd slipped into an elegant patterned type of combat suit, very tight around the legs, with the shirt unbuttoned to reveal a full expanse of white torso. The trousers were turned up at the calves to allow a better glimpse of a huge pair of red plastic boots with at least three-inch rubber soles; and the hair was Vidal Sassooned into such impeccable shape that one held one's breath in case the slight breeze from the window dared to ruffle it. I wish you could have been there to vada him; he was so super.

David uses words like "vada" and "super" quite a lot. He's gay, he says. Mmmmm. A few months back, when he played Hampstead's Country Club, a small, greasy club in north London which has seen all sorts of exciting occasions, about half the gay population of the city turned up to see him in his massive floppy velvet hat, which he twirled around at the end of each number. According to Stuart Lyon, the club's manager, a little gay brother sat right up close to the stage throughout the whole evening, spellbound with admiration.

As it happens, David doesn't have much time for Gay Liberation. That's a particular movement he doesn't want to lead. He despises all these tribal qualifications. Flower power he enjoyed, but it's individuality that he's trying to preserve. The paradox is that he still has what he describes as "a good relationship" with his wife. And his baby son, Zowie. He supposes he's what people call bisexual.

They call David a lot of things. In the States he's been referred to as the English Bob Dylan and an avant-garde outrage all rolled up together. *The New York Times* talks of his "coherent and brilliant vision". They like him a lot there. Back home, in the very stiff upper lip UK, where people are outraged by Alice Cooper even, there ain't too many who have picked up on him. His last but one album, *The Man Who Sold The World*, cleared 50,000 copies in the States; here it sold CONTINUES OVER»

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

about five copies and Bowie bought them.

Yes, but before this year is out, all those of you who puked up on Alice are going to be focusing on Mr Bowie, and those who know where it's at will be thrilling to a voice that seemingly undergoes brilliant metamorphosis from song to song, a songwriting ability that will enslave the heart, and a sense of theatrics that will make the ablest thespians gnaw on their sticks of eyeliner in envy. All this, and an amazingly accomplished band, featuring super lead guitarist Mick Ronson, that can smack you round the skull with their heaviness and soothe the savage breast with their delicacy. Oh, to be young again.

The reason is Bowie's new album, *Hunky Dory*, which combines a gift for irresistible melody lines with lyrics that work on several levels – as straightforward narrative, philosophy or allegory, depending on how deep you wish to plumb the depths. He has a knack of suffusing strong, simple pop melodics with words and arrangements full of mystery and darkling hints.

Thus "Oh! You Pretty Things", the Peter Noone hit, is on one strata, particularly the chorus, about the feelings of a father-to-be; on a deeper level it concerns Bowie's belief in a superhuman race – homo superior – to which he refers obliquely: *"I think about a world to come/where the books were found by The Golden Ones/Written in pain, written in awe/by a puzzled man who questioned what we were here for/Oh, the strangers came today, and it looks as though they're here to stay."* The idea of Peter Noone singing such a heavy number fills me with considerable amusement. That's outrageous, as David says himself.

But then Bowie has an instinct for incongruities. On *The Man…* album there's a bit at the end of "Black Country Rock" where he superbly parodies his friend Marc Bolan's vibrato warblings. On "Hunky Dory" he devotes a track called "Queen Bitch" to the Velvets, wherein he takes off to a tee the Lou Reed vocal and arrangement, as well as parodying, with a storyline about the singer's boyfriend being seduced by another queen, the whole Velvet Underground genre.

Then again, at various times on his albums he resorts to a very broad Cockney accent, as on "Saviour Machine" (*The Man…*) and here with "The Bewlay Brothers". He says he copped it off Tony Newley because he was mad about *Stop The World…* and … *Gurney Slade*: "He used to make his points with this broad Cockney accent and I decided that I'd use that now and again to drive a point home."

The fact that Bowie has an acute ear for parody doubtless stems from an innate sense of theatre. He says he's more an actor and entertainer than musician; that he may, in fact, only be an actor and nothing else. "Inside this invincible frame there might be an invisible man." You kidding? "Not at all. I'm not particularly taken with life, I'd probably be good as just an astral spirit."

Bowie is talking in an office at Gem Music, from where his management operates. A tape machine is playing his next album, *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars*, which is about this fictitious pop group. The music has got a very hard-edged sound, like *The Man Who Sold The World*. They're releasing it shortly, even though *Hunky Dory* has only just come out.

Everyone just knows that David is going to be a lollapalooza of a superstar throughout the entire world this year, David more than most. His songs are always 10 years ahead of their time, he says, but this year he has anticipated the trends: "I'm going to be huge, and it's quite frightening in a way," he says, his big red boots stabbing the air in time to the music. "Because I know that when I reach my peak and it's time for me to be brought down it will be with a bump."

"I KNOW THAT WHEN I REACH MY PEAK AND IT'S TIME FOR ME TO BE BROUGHT DOWN, IT WILL BE WITH A BUMP!"

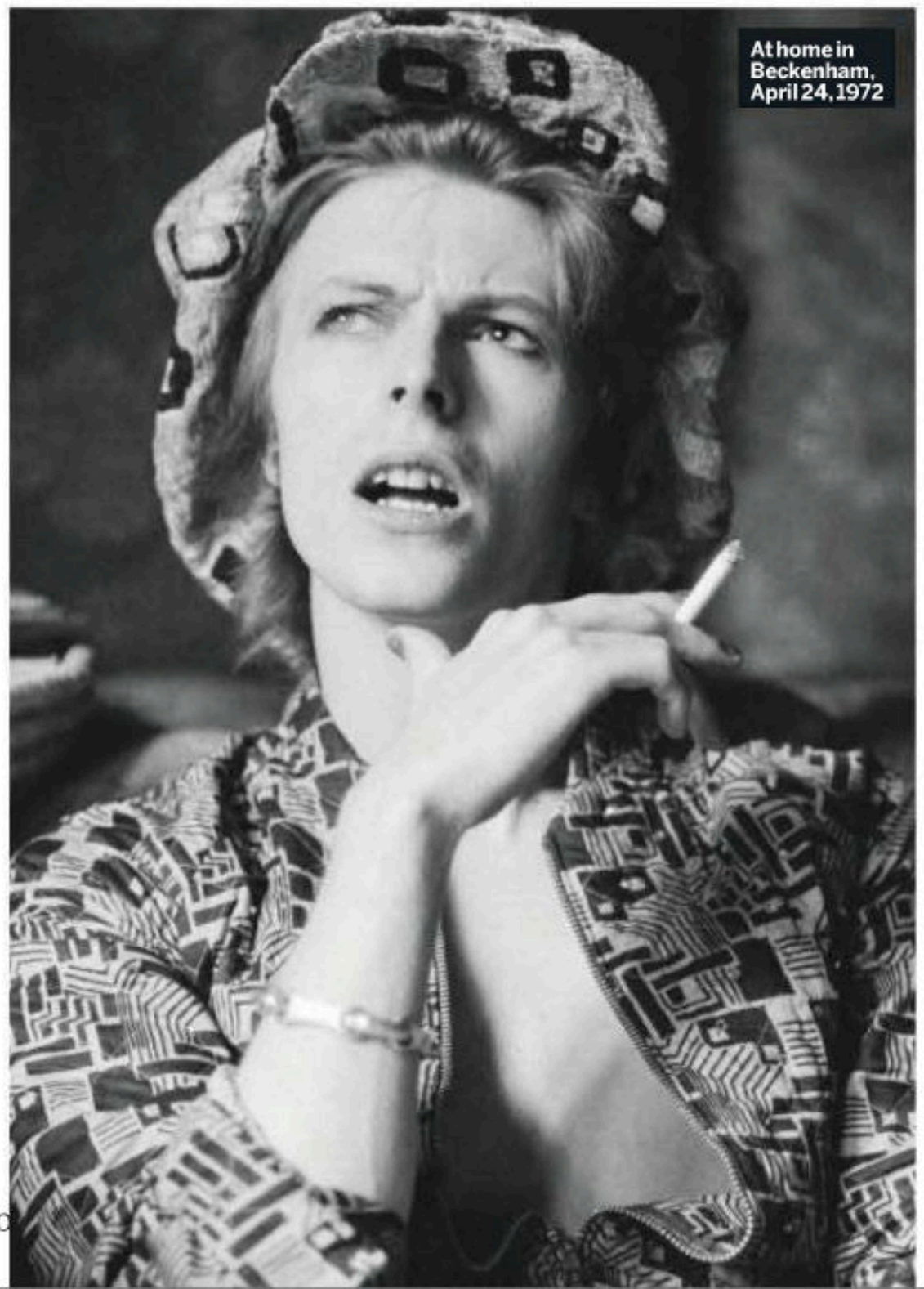
The man who's sold the world this prediction has had a winner before, of course. Remember "Space Oddity", which chronicled Major Tom's dilemma, aside from boosting the sales of the Stylophone? That was a Top 10 hit in '69, but since then Bowie has hardly performed at all in public. He appeared for a while at an arts lab he co-founded in Beckenham, Kent, where he lives, but when he realised that people were going there on a Friday night to see Bowie the hit singer working out, rather than for any idea of experimental art, he seems to have become disillusioned. That project foundered, and he wasn't up to going out on one-nighters all over the country at that particular time.

So in the past three years he has devoted his time to the production of three albums, *David Bowie* (which contains "Space Oddity") and *The Man…* for Philips and *Hunky Dory* for RCA. His first album was released in 1967 on the new Deram label but it didn't sell outstandingly, and Decca, it seems, lost interest in him.

It all began for him, though, when he was 15 and his brother gave him a book about playing an instrument. He took up sax because that was the main instrument featured in the book (Gerry Mulligan, right?). So in '63 he was playing tenor in a London R'n'B band before going on to found a semi-pro progressive blues group called David Jones And The Lower Third (later changing his name in '68 when Davy Jones of The Monkees became famous). He left this band in 1967 and became a performer in the folk clubs.

Since he was 14, however, he had been interested in Buddhism and Tibet, and after the failure of his first LP he dropped out of music completely and devoted his time to the Tibet Society, whose aim was to help the lamas driven out of the country in the Tibetan/Chinese war. He was instrumental in setting up the Scottish monastery in Dumfries in this period. He says, in fact, that he would have liked to have been a Tibetan monk, and would have done if he hadn't met Lindsay Kemp, who ran a mime company in London: "It was as magical as Buddhism, and I completely sold out and became a city creature. I suppose that's when my interest in image really blossomed."

David's present image is to come on like a swishy queen, a gorgeously effeminate boy. He's as camp as a row of tents, with his limp hand and trolling vocabulary. "I'm gay," he says, "and always have been, even when I was David Jones." But there's a sly jollity about how he says it, a secret smile at the corners of his mouth. He knows that in these times it's permissible to act like a male tart, and that to shock and outrage, which pop has always striven to do



At home in Beckenham, April 24, 1972

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Performing "Starman" on *Lift Off With Ayshea* – with Mick Ronson and Mick Woodmansey, June 1972

through its history, is a balls-breaking process.

And if he's not an outrage, he is, at the least, an amusement. The expression of his sexual ambivalence establishes a fascinating game: is he or isn't he? In a period of conflicting sexual identity he shrewdly exploits the confusion surrounding the male and female roles. "Why aren't you wearing your girl's dress today?" I said to him (he has no monopoly on tongue-in-cheek humour). "Oh dear," he replied, "you must understand that it's not a woman's. It's a man's dress."

He began wearing dresses, of whatever gender, two years ago, but he says he has done outrageous things before that were just not accepted by society. It's just so happened, he remarks, that in the past two years people have loosened up to the fact that there are bisexuals in the world – "and – horrible fact – homosexuals." He smiles, enjoying his addenda.

"The important fact is that I don't have to drag up. I want to go on like this for long after the fashion has finished. I'm just a cosmic yob, I suppose. I've always worn my own style of clothes. I design them. I designed this." He broke off to indicate with his arm what he was wearing. "I just don't like the clothes that you buy in shops. I don't wear dresses all the time, either. I change every day. I'm not outrageous. I'm David Bowie."

How does dear Alice go down with him, I asked, and he shook his head, disdainfully: "Not at all. I bought his first album, but it didn't excite me or shock me. I think he's trying to be outrageous. You can see him, poor dear, with his red eyes sticking out and his temples straining. He tries so hard. That bit he does with the boa constrictor, a friend of mine, Rudy Valentino, was doing ages before. The next thing I see is Miss C with her boa. I find him very demeaning. It's very premeditated, but quite fitting with our era. He's probably more successful than I am at present, but I've invented a new category of artist, with my chiffon and taff. They call it pantomime rock in the States."

Despite his flouncing, however, it would be sadly amiss to think of David merely as a kind of glorious drag act. An image, once strained and stretched unnaturally, will ultimately diminish an artist. And Bowie is just that. He foresees this potential dilemma, too, when he says he doesn't want to emphasise his external self much more. He has enough image. This year he is devoting most of his time to stage work and records. As he says, that's what counts at the death. He will stand or fall on his music.

As a songwriter he doesn't strike me as an intellectual, as he does some. Rather, his ability to express a theme from all aspects seems intuitive. His songs are less carefully structured thoughts than the outpourings of the unconscious. He says he rarely tries to communicate to himself, to think an idea out. "If I see a star and it's red I wouldn't try to say why it's red. I would think how shall I best describe to X that that star is such a colour. I don't question much; I just relate. I see my answers in other people's writings. My own work can be compared to talking to a psychoanalyst. My act is a couch."

It's because his music is rooted in this lack of consciousness that he admires Syd Barrett so much. He believes that Syd's freewheeling approach to lyrics opened the gates for him; both of them, he thinks, ate the creation of their own songs. And if Barrett made that initial breakthrough, it's Lou Reed and Iggy Pop who have since kept him going and helped him to expand his unconsciousness. He and Lou and Iggy, he says, are going to take over the world. They're the songwriters he admires.

His other great inspiration is mythology. He has a great need to believe in the legends of the past, particularly those of Atlantis; and for the same need he has created a myth of the future, a belief in an imminent race of supermen – Homo Superior. It's his only glimpse of hope, he says – "all the things that we can't do they will."

It's a belief created out of resignation with the way society in general has moved. He's not very hopeful about the future of the world. A year ago he was saying that he gave mankind 40 years. A track on his next album, outlining his conviction, is called "Five Years". He's a fatalist, a confirmed pessimist, as you can see.

"Pretty Things", that breezy Herman song, links this fatalistic attitude with the glimmer of hope that he sees in the birth of his son, a sort of poetic equation of homo superior. "I think," he says, "we have created a new kind of person in a way. We have created a child who will be so exposed to the media that he will be lost to his parents by the time his is 12."

That's exactly the sort of technological vision Stanley Kubrick foresees for the near future in *A Clockwork Orange*. Strong stuff. And a long, long way away from the camp carry-ons.

Don't dismiss David Bowie as a serious musician just because he likes to put us on a little.

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

"I'm closer to the Golden Dawn..." **Lyrics from "Quicksand" reference The Hermetic Order Of The Golden Dawn, a magical cabal founded in 1888, whose members included Bram Stoker and WB Yeats. The order practised tarot, astrology and alchemy and was still active up until 1978.**

ITV/REX FEATURES

RELEASE DATE 06 | JUNE | 1972

THE RISE AND FALL OF ZIGGY STARDUST AND THE SPIDERS FROM MARS

A cautionary tale about rock'n'roll stardom, essayed by a singer going supernova. Can Bowie hang onto himself? *By Alastair McKay*

THE RISE AND Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars can be viewed many ways – a flawed concept album about a doomed rock'n'roller; an outer space opera featuring an extra-terrestrial god – but in its simplest interpretation, it is an essay on fame and a stunning piece of wish-fulfilment.

Bowie began *Ziggy Stardust* shortly after the release of the acclaimed, but modest-selling *Hunky Dory*, with several songs (including the title track and scene-setter "Five Years") being recorded in the autumn and winter of 1971. Twelve months later – a direct result of a brilliantly waged PR campaign and "Starman", his first hit single since "Space Oddity" – both LPs had set up near-permanent residence in the UK's Top 10. *Ziggy* would ultimately spend nearly four years on the British charts. After years of public indifference, Bowie had become his creation, the ultimate rock'n'roll star.

The importance of the *Ziggy* concept can be overstated, but Bowie certainly had extravagant plans – a full stage show which changed every night, a TV special – as he revealed in an interview with William Burroughs for *Rolling Stone* in late 1973. The idea was apocalyptic, with the action set five years before the end of the world. Natural resources were running out, and Ziggy, the rock'n'roll anti-hero, discovered that he was unable to play, and had nothing to say. Hope arrives with the prospective appearance of "the infinites", black-hole jumpers, prophesied by Ziggy, who is rewarded for his prescience by being torn to pieces by the visitors while performing onstage. "The infinites really are a black hole, but I've made them people because it would be very hard to explain a black hole on stage," Bowie tells Burroughs. "Yes, a black hole on stage would be an incredible expense," deadpans the author in response. "And it would be a continuing performance, first eating up Shaftesbury Avenue…"

Happily, not all of those high-flung concepts made it onto the album itself. What remains is a cautionary tale about a fated rock'n'roll star with an overactive imagination and an interest in extra-terrestrial life, all welded to some of the most powerful, exhilarating, out-there music Bowie has ever made. The model for Ziggy – among others – was Vince Taylor, an early British rock'n'roller who destroyed his mind with LSD and ended his career with a catastrophic performance in France, where he claimed to be the Messiah. Bowie was fascinated by his fate; attracted, and worried, by the notion that a rock career could spiral so far out of control.

Such is the architecture of *Ziggy Stardust*, though the album works just as well as brilliantly strange rock'n'roll, or – to paraphrase one of the album's most famous cuts – crazy cosmic jive. The beautiful opener, "Five Years", is unusually journalistic for a Bowie song. It's a bit Huxley, a bit *Twilight Zone*, a bit Burroughs. The newsreader, his face wet with tears, has just announced that the earth is dying. The narrator – let's assume it is Ziggy – wanders into the street, trying to collect memories: "*My brain hurt like a warehouse, it has no room to spare.*" He surveys the chaos. "*A cop knelt and kissed the feet of a priest, and a queer threw up at the sight of that.*" Not so much prophecy, as the vision of a lunatic.

From here, matters become even weirder, even more wired. "Soul Love" is a pained reflection on loss and loneliness, though some of Bowie's alleged optimism is evident in the verse about new love and new words, which suggest that the birth of Bowie's son, Zowie, in May 1971 may have lightened his mood.

"Moonage Daydream", first recorded for Bowie's protégés, Arnold Corns, is pure space madness, appearing as it does to tell the story of an act of intergalactic sex with an alligator. There's a bit of raygun abuse, and some

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"There's nothing Bowie would like more than to be a glittery superstar and it could still come to pass."
JAMES JOHNSON, NME, JUNE 10, 1972

"There are many layers to the Bowie the artist, but he has this uncanny knack of turning an entire album into a torch song. His bid for stardom is accelerating at lightning speed."
MICHAEL WATTS, MELODY MAKER, JULY 1, 1972

TRACKMARKS | ...Ziggy Stardust

1. **Five Years** ★★★★★
2. **Soul Love** ★★★★
3. **Moonage Daydream** ★★★★
4. **Starman** ★★★★★
5. **It Ain't Easy** ★★★
6. **Lady Stardust** ★★★★★
7. **Star** ★★★★
8. **Hang On To Yourself** ★★★★★
9. **Ziggy Stardust** ★★★★★
10. **Suffragette City** ★★★★★
11. **Rock'N'Roll Suicide** ★★★★★

RELEASED: June 6, 1972
LABEL: RCA Victor

PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Ken Scott
RECORDED AT: Trident studios, London
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, acoustic guitar, saxophone, piano, harpsichord); Mick Ronson (guitar, piano, backing vocals, string arrangements); Trevor Bolder (bass); Mick Woodmansey (drums); Dana Gillespie (backing vocals on "It Ain't Easy"); Rick Wakeman (harpsichord, keyboards); Lindsay Scott (violin).
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 5; US 75

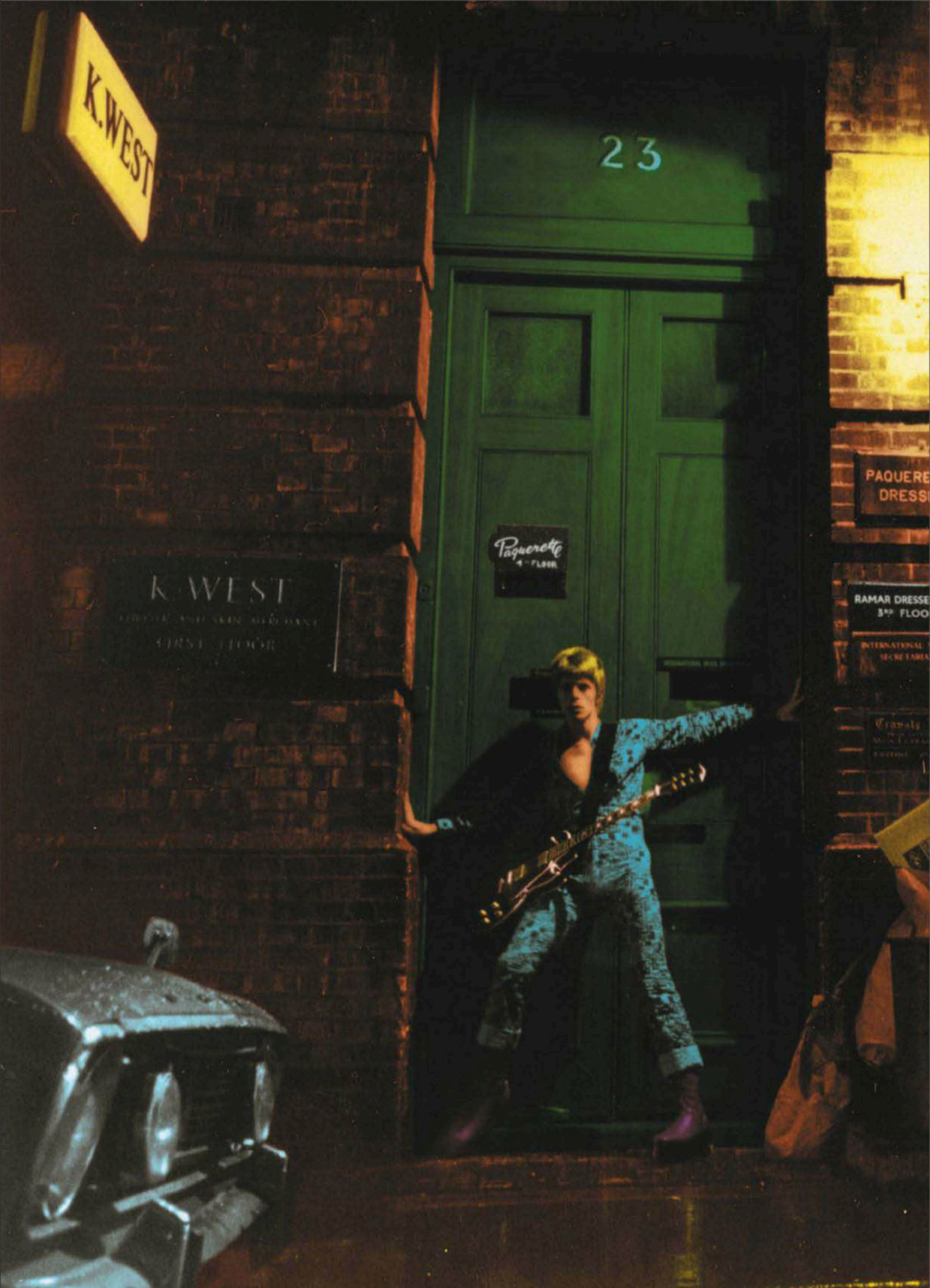
interplanetary pillow-talk: "*Put your space face close to mine, love.*" Ridiculous, obviously, but with the words wrapped around the monstrous constructions of Mick Ronson's guitar – anvil-heavy here, stuttering there, culminating in one of the greatest guitar solos in all of rock – Bowie's twisted logic makes its own sense. Ronson's contribution to the entire enterprise should not be understated. Sonically, he was an original – an Apollo moonshot Duane Eddy; Keith to Bowie's Mick.

But this is Bowie's show. From "Starman", the quality never wavers. (Save the Ron Davies composition "It Ain't Easy" – a rash of heavy blues, which works only in the sense that it makes Side Two seem more manic.) "Starman" boils Bowie's religious ideas about god being "an energy form" into transcendent pop – not your average Top 10 chart material in summer '72. In fact Bowie's breakthrough single was the very last track he had written for the album, at the urging of RCA exec Dennis Katz. "Lady Stardust" is the record's big gay heart, describing a sexually charged performer who appeals to both men and women. With Ronson's elegant piano, it sounds like an Elton John song, though it's widely thought to be about Marc Bolan.

On "Star'" – a saloon bar piano and a rattling guitar riff – Ziggy unfolds his manifesto of rock'n'roll as a transformative force. The glam thunder of "Hang On To Yourself" sounds like the blueprint for punk, while on "Ziggy Stardust" itself the metallic riffs melt, and Ziggy's brain begins to fry. "Suffragette City" is a perfect retro rock'n'roll tune with the momentum of a rolling boulder and the urgency of a siren.

Which leaves the majestic "Rock'N'Roll Suicide", a shamelessly dramatic curtain closer, and a song made for the high concept of Bowie's stage shows. It builds, inexorably, from those striking opening lines ("*Time takes a cigarette/Puts it in your mouth*") through crescendo after crunching crescendo. As a piece of sheer rock theatre, it remains unsurpassed.

Where does that leave *Ziggy Stardust*? Well, it's an adolescent fantasy, a time capsule, a mix of pulp literature and overstimulation. In that sense; classic rock'n'roll. But it's also the sound of Bowie testing the boundaries of his career. He's looking over the edge of the precipice and deciding whether he wants to be a star.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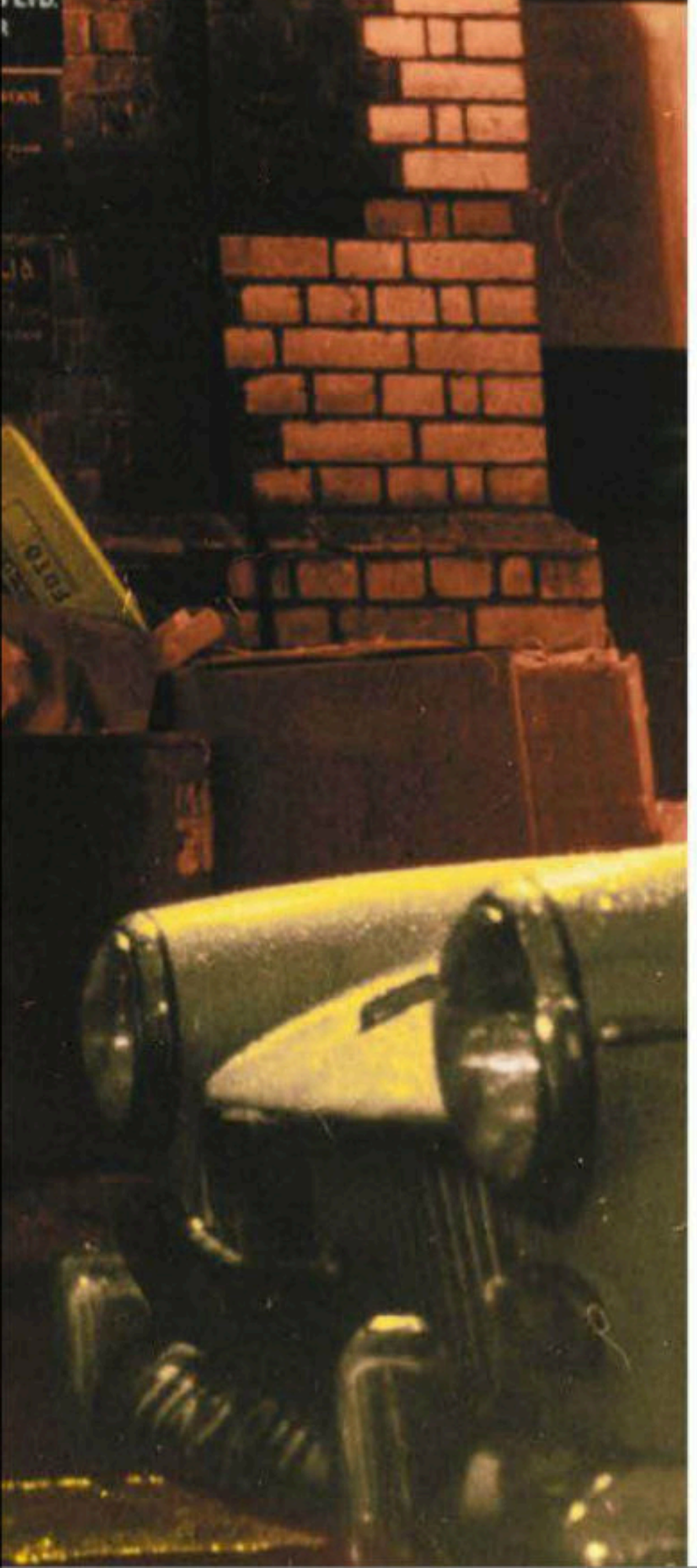
"ZIGGY IS MY GIFT TO YOU..."

Kisses for Lou Reed, songs for Mott The Hoople – and, for the rest of us, the extraordinary vision of Ziggy Stardust. CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY penetrates Ziggy's debauched world and checks up on Bowie's musical knowledge... "I'm not a musician!"



TAKEN FROM NME 22/07/1972

THREE CHANGES of dress and a kiss from Lou Reed. The waiters were horrified.

Jill and Lyn are 17 and they're into Bowie. They've both seen David work three times in as many weeks. They've both got *Ziggy Stardust* and neither of them like Marc Bolan. Jill says she likes the way David looks. She doesn't necessarily think he's good-looking she just likes the way he looks. They and me and a sweaty hallful of other people saw David Bowie and the Spiders From Mars work Friars in Aylesbury at the weekend. The phantom waver of the Ziggy banner put in an appearance as well, and it was all right, the band were altogether and Ziggy played guitar.

The Spiders are a surrealistic vision of a rock band. Trevor Bolder's silvered sideboards hang several inches off his face and Woody Woodmansey's hair is an orange Vidal-Sassoon duck's ass similar to David's. Through the show at top speed until the final encore of "Suffragette City" where David pulls off his most outrageous stunt and goes down on Mick Ronson's guitar. David is gonna be huge.

The day after the gig he's holding an extended press conference at the Dorchester Hotel, held especially for the planeload of American writers flown in for the weekend. In the foyer everything is frosty, air-conditioned elegance, in slow motion after the sweltering dusty street. Down the mirrored corridors of the second floor through the door into a suitably chic room where assorted media people are eating cakes and sandwiches and drinking tea and/or scotch.

Lou Reed and his band are there, all the Spiders and, curled up in a corner in a Bolan T-shirt, eye shadow, and silvered hair, is Iggy Pop. When I got there David was wearing an entirely different outfit. Before I left he'd changed into a third.

David's wife, lithe and crew-cut, is smoothing things down, getting together drinks and being assaulted by Lou's roadie. When I arrived, he'd just bitten her in the stomach and as she's very slim, the bite had gone direct to her abdominal muscles and everybody was falling about. Woody pours me a sumptuous Johnny Walker Black Label and peach juice. Lou Reed is talking quietly to David. He's wearing shades and maroon fingernails. Periodically, horrified waiters enter to deliver yet more scotch and wine and sandwiches.

NME: At the moment, the most popular rock journalist words appear to be funk, camp and punk. To what extent do you think you've brought these words into essential usage?
BOWIE: I think it's most probably due to the general inarticulacy of the press. They're very small-minded. They do indeed revolve around those three words.

Not revolve around. They crop up...
Yes, they do. Funk, I don't think CONTINUES OVER»

BRIAN WARD

I've anything to do with it. I never considered myself funky. Would you say that? I wouldn't…

Would you want to be?
Yes. It's a muddy kind of thing. Camp, yes I understand the camp thing. Once upon a time it was, I think, put down in the category of entertainer but since the departure of good old-fashioned entertainers the re-emergence of somebody who wants to be an entertainer has unfortunately become a synonym for camp. I don't think I'm camper than any other person who felt at home onstage, and felt more at home onstage than he did offstage.

Nobody ever called Jerry Garcia camp.
No, right, but he's a musician and I'm not a musician. I'm not into music, you see, on that level. I don't profess to have music as my big wheel and there are a number of other things as important to me apart from music. Theatre and mime, for instance.

You say you don't consider yourself a musician, but for somebody who's producing music of a very high grade, I would reckon that you're entitled to be called a musician.
Okay then, I'll shift my emphasis. I wouldn't think I'd ever be considered a technocrat on any instrument. I have a creative force which finds its way through into a musical form.

You were saying you didn't consider yourself to be a musician.
In that terminology, in that definition: that a musician is a virtuoso on his instrument? By no stretch of the imagination. I play a good alto, I played a bit actually on the Mott album, which is quite pleasing for me, having not touched a sax for a long time.

You used it on *Hunky Dory*?
Yes, but just for a few phrases. I used it quite heavily on the Mott thing. [*Interjection: You used it onstage*] What? Yeah, I did a James Brown thing for a couple of gigs. We did "Hot Pants" and we blew a bit. We did it at some of the gigs where there seemed to be a lot of Mods, so we thought we'd throw it in… I ad-libbed most of it.

I remember five years ago trying to run a blues band and failing completely because people were standing at the front shouting, "Geno! Geno! Play some Tamla!"
Oh yeah, but I was a great soul merchant, a James Brown merchant. I've always dug his very funky things, but I've never considered that I was capable… I'm never gonna try and play black music because I'm white. Singularly white!

There's a distinct kind of white funk. Velvet Underground for instance. Going by that as a yardstick of funk and not Albert King. Wouldn't you say that what you are doing is a certain kind of funk?
Yes, I couldn't put my finger on what it is. Of the rock'n'roll things that we write, they would definitely be in the Velvets bag, because that's my biggest influence in rock'n'roll, more so than Chuck Berry, the archetype.

I'd say that Lou Reed was to you as Chuck Berry was to the Stones.
Yes, very much so, that's a very good analogy, and I agree with it entirely. In fact I've said the same myself on numerous occasions.

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND HALF THE STUFF I WRITE. SO MANY PEOPLE TELL ME WHAT MY SONGS ARE ABOUT..."

The second preconceived question I came with was that rock'n'roll is increasingly becoming a ritual. Instead of the very down-to-earth stance of, say, the Dead. It's becoming very much of a spectacle, very formularised.
I've not seen many bands where I've noticed that.

Alice is a very extreme example. You come into it to a certain extent. I think Bolan does. Sha Na Na in their own particular way also…
Well, you must firstly tell me your feelings on this before I quite know what your question is…

I have mixed feelings about it… in some cases it works. I think it works when you do it, but sometimes I get the feeling that the audience is being excluded.
Yes, I feel that a great deal more theatre does not necessarily mean props. As you saw with us, we were using no props. We're not into props. If we have theatricality it comes through from us as people, not as a set environment or stage. Like playing an instrument, theatre craftsmanship is something that one learns. There are going to be a lot of tragedies and a lot of clangers dropped over the next few years when a lot of bands try to become theatrical without knowing their craft. I'm a very professional person, and I feel that I contribute all my energies into my stage performance, that when I'm onstage I give more to an audience than to anybody else when I'm offstage. I've worked hard at it. I was with a mime company and I've had other theatre experience. What I'm trying to say is that it's important to know about the things you do and to have learnt it, as it is to learn you instrument. As the theatrical expression evolves, a lot of it is going to be on a secondary school amateur dramatics level. There will only be the odd bands who have the knowledge to master their theatre. Iggy has natural theatre. It's very interesting because it doesn't conform to any standards or rules or structures of theatre. It's his own and it's just a Detroit theatre that he's brought with him. It's straight from the street. Remember we have only been on the road for three months, so it's still coming together, but I wish myself to be a prop, if anything, for my songs. I want to be the vehicle for my songs. I would like to colour the material with as much visual expression as is necessary for that song.

One thing I've noticed is the way you use words, like in "Andy Warhol" where you transform the word "Wall" into "Warhol". I mean, the way you listen to speech and incorporate it into sound.
One can say a sentence to three people and it'll take on an entirely different meaning for each of those three people. I think if any of my stuff becomes at all surrealistic it's because that's the purpose of it. It's to give people their own definitions. I certainly don't understand half the stuff I write. I can look back on a song I've just written and it means something entirely different now because of my new circumstances, new this or that. I get told by so many people – especially Americans – what my songs are about.

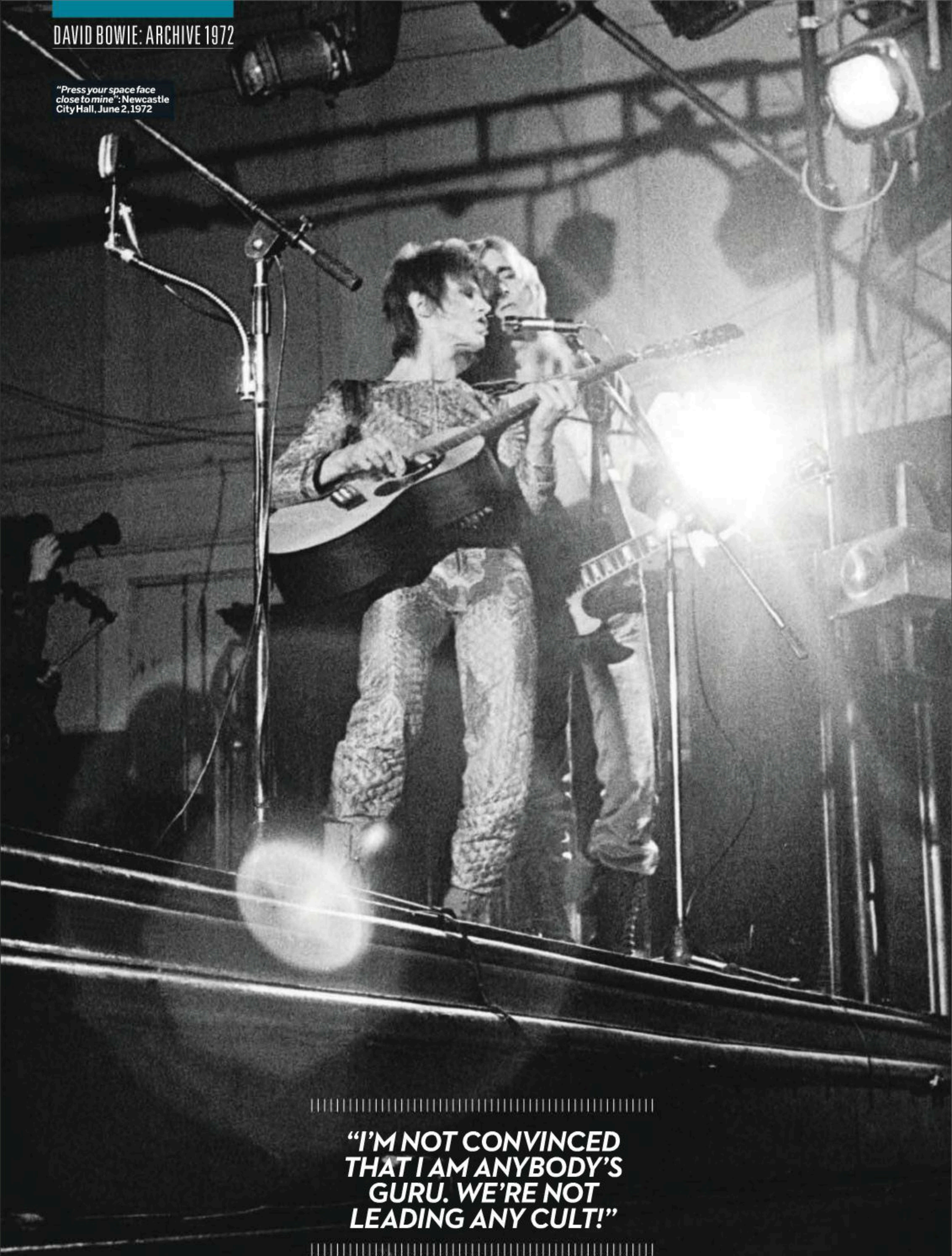
You'd better watch out or you'll have your very own AJ Weberman rooting through your garbage.
I have one already! He's not quite at garbage level yet, but he's certainly very adamant about what I mean. It's disconcerting to say the least. Alarming. But America is made up of academics. They're very Germanic in that respect. Because they're so subconsciously aware CONTINUES OVER»

Queen bitches: with Lou Reed at the Dorchester

RETNA

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Always crashing in a hired car! On July 17, 1972 – the day after this interview – Bowie and Angie went on a two-week holiday to Kyrenia, Cyprus. They rented a vehicle, which Bowie promptly drove into another car outside a level-crossing. Dangerous driving charges were dropped after Bowie offered damages.



***"Press your space face close to mine"*: Newcastle City Hall, June 2, 1972**

"I'M NOT CONVINCED THAT I AM ANYBODY'S GURU. WE'RE NOT LEADING ANY CULT!"

of being a new nation that has no accepted roots in the old world, they strive for their own culture as fast and as quickly as they can. Whatever isn't needed is soaked up by the media and becomes part of the American way of life. They're terribly self-conscious about everything. The level to which rock music has become an academic subject is just incredible. I could walk into a shop and see row upon row of books about any aspect of rock. I mean writers about rock. I mean writers about writers. There are even books on Meltzer. Layer upon layer. It's a build-up. They're making their own culture.

Another line of yours I wanted to ask you about is in "Five Years". You said, *"I never knew I'd need so many people."*
Basically what it means is realising the inevitability of the apocalypse, in whatever form it takes. I was being careful not to say what form it would take because that to me would be incredibly sad and I just tried to get that feeling over in one line. It's like the things you flash on supposedly when you're dying, running down the street and…

His whole life passed before him…
Yeah, really, it's like that, the grasping for life.

Do you feel worried by people who regard you as a guru?
I'm not that convinced, at the moment, that I am anybody's guru. I know there is a lot of interest in what I'm doing, and we seem to be getting our goodly fair share of exposure, but I'm not convinced that we are leading any particular cult.

But it's happening almost in spite of you, people examining your albums almost line by line.
Okay, well if this is going to be an inevitable situation with the chronicles of rock, and one must presume that it will be, then I would strive to use that position to promote some feeling of optimism in the future, which might seem very hypocritical related to "Five Years". There the whole thing was to try and get a mocking angle at the future. If I can mock something and deride it, one isn't so scared of it. People are so incredibly serious and scared of the future that I would wish to turn the feeling the other way, into a wave of optimism. If one can take the mickey out of the future, and what it is going to be like… It's going to be unbelievably technological. There isn't going to be a triangle system, we aren't going to revert back to the real way of life. That's not going to happen. It's certainly not a new thing. My God, I haven't got any new concept. I juggle with them, but what I'm saying, I think, has been said a million times before. I'm just saying again that we've gotta have some optimism in the future.

REX FEATURES, GETTY

"Gimme your hands…": Aylesbury, July 15, 1972

"Five Years" struck me as an optimistic song.
It is, it is. The album in fact should be taken that way. "Starman" can be taken at the immediate level of "There's a Starman in the sky saying boogie, children", but the theme of that is that the idea of things in the sky is really quite human and real and we should be a bit happier about the prospect of meeting people.

On the second side of *Ziggy Stardust*, the songs seem to go in a cycle. But when you play live you don't necessarily play them in that order.
I must admit I speculate on the prospect of a show which would be *Ziggy Stardust*, but the way I want to do it requires a lot of planning and we haven't had time for that. I'd rather leave it alone until it's gonna be done properly. I don't want to do anything unless it's gonna be done well.

In the other room I saw a tape box of the Mott album [*All The Young Dudes*]. The only title I recognised was "Sweet Jane".
That's right, Lou came down. I've got Lou singing it at the moment. I've got to put Ian on, but he doesn't know the lyrics yet.

So you recorded it with Lou Reed singing on Mott's backing?
Lou phrased it so Ian can pick up how it was.

How does it sound when Mott play it?
Fabulous, really good. I'll play it for you. They've never written better stuff. They were so down when I first met them.

They were having troubles with Island, weren't they?
Oh, everything was wrong. Everything was terrible, and because they were so down I thought I was gonna have to contribute a lot of material. Now, they're in a wave of optimism and they've written everything on the album bar one Lou Reed number and the "…Dudes" single I did for them. They were being led into so many directions, because of general apathy with their management and recording company. Everybody was very excited about them when they first came out and then, because they didn't click immediately, it fell away. When I first saw them, and that wasn't very long ago, I couldn't believe that a band so full of integrity and a really naive exuberance could command such enormous following and not be talked about. The reactions at their concerts were superb, and it's sad that nothing was done about them. They were breaking up, I mean, they broke up for three days and I caught them just in time and put them together again 'cos all the kids love them.

[*At this point, Bowie put on the rough tape of the Mott LP. First cut was Lou and Mott's "Sweet Jane". It sounded the best Mott I've heard. While it was playing, Reed entered the room. I hoped to get him to join in the conversation but he just came over and kissed David.*]

REED: That's it. [*exit*]

I was hoping to get a two-way interview.

BOWIE: That was a two-way interview.

Next week: The mind-shattering conclusion of this glitzy, super neato interview. Be there or be square!

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

When he produced Lou Reed's *Transformer* in 1973, Bowie personally requested baritone saxophonist Ronnie Ross – the very man who taught Bowie to play at the age of 13. Ross hadn't made the connection and was shocked to find out just who his former pupil was. "You always said you'd be a rock star!" Ross told him.

TAKEN FROM NME 29/07/1972

THE STORY SO far: Lord Ziggy and his pals are holding court at the Dorchester, drinking, looning, doing interviews and generally having a day of good jolly superstar fun. In addition to getting her midriff bitten by Lou Reed's manager Ernie, Lady Ziggy (alias Angie Bowie) had fun by sinking her teeth into the generously proportioned left breast of US rock historian Lillian Roxon. Among a welter of other happenings which even Lou Reed doesn't want to discuss, this reporter (a shy, young small-town kid bewildered by such extravagant debauchery) continued his epoch-making interview with David Bowie. We enter the conversation after Bowie and Lou Reed had conducted what Ziggy described as "the shortest interview on record".

BOWIE: I like to see people pretending…

NME: You retired after "Space Oddity": Would you ever do it again?
BOWIE: I can't envisage stopping gigging for the next year at least, because CONTINUES OVER»

The world was not yet ready: a pre-Ziggy Bowie at the Roundhouse, London, March 11, 1970

I'm having such a good time doing it. I've never enjoyed it more. I feel I'm one with the band I'm working with and that hasn't happened before for me. I've always felt I was dragging people into doing things. I had a band once before which had the same lead guitarist.

Yeah, I saw you work at the Roundhouse once with Country Joe about two years ago.
That Roundhouse gig was the kind of thing I cite, in that I was into something there that the band wasn't into. They were very much still only wanting to be musicians at the time, and it came off as no more than everybody dressing up. Was that the one you came to where I was wearing a silver superman suit?

You weren't. You did "Cypress Avenue".
We did one at the Roundhouse about the same period when we appeared very much the same as we are appearing now, and that was with Mick Ronson. I was in a cartoon strip and we all dressed up as a different super hero.

Who were you?
No-one in particular, but superhero type figures. We had silver suits, the thing I used to wear for "Space Oddity", that silver catsuit which is exactly the same as this. It hasn't changed at all in three years, if you think about it, but it's different material. I was in silver lamé and a blue silver cloak and silvered hair, blue hair, the whole thing, glitter everywhere. The whole thing was on that scale.

Were they ready to cope with it at the time?
No, they weren't. We died a death. And, of course, the boys said look, I told you so, let's get back to just being a band again. That's the period that broke me up. I just about stopped after that performance, 'cos I knew it was right, it was what I wanted to do, and I knew it was what people would want eventually. I didn't know when, though, so I held on. I knew it would happen, because I've always been excited about seeing things that are visually exciting and it's always knocking me out. I like seeing people pretending. I have a great imagination. I'm not a vegetable. I like to let my imagination run wild and I thought, well if that does that to me, it has to do it to other people as well, 'cos I'm just a person. I'm not quite that much of a superman. And, anyway, I'm glad I stuck it out, really.

Could you name four or five specific records that influenced you early on?
Yes, "Alley Oop" by The Hollywood Argyles – just a feeling that came from it. I'm afraid I'm not very technical on things like that and all I can say, at best, is that it was a feel I had an empathy with. I don't know what it was, if it was the zaniness of the record, or what.

Is that the one about the caveman?
Yes, and that was Kim Fowley as a matter of fact. He was the Hollywood Argyle that did it, and I loved parody because…

Zappa?
Yes, I admire Zappa, but I prefer Charles Mingus. I like my parody to be a little softer as I'm a pacifist person by nature and hostility in any form, even on a mental level, I find not endearing. Zappa may have a problem with feeling that he was not accepted on a Mingus level and he had to find himself an audience. I don't think he's ever forgotten that.

But "Pithecanthropus Erectus" is not quite the same as "Brown Shoes Don't Make It"?
Well, that's the strength of my view on parody. I'm a softer person by nature. I'm not hostile. I don't believe I'm an aggressive performer either. I like the situation that seems to develop with the audience which is on a human level and they're quite friendly. It's neither screamy nor rebellious: it just has a good feeling to it. I love my audiences. I think I've not been to too many gigs where the feeling is not nice. It's a very warm feeling I get from audiences.

> **"I'M STILL TOTALLY INVOLVED WITH ZIGGY… THEN WE'LL DON ANOTHER MASK"**

Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't there one cut on *The Man Who Sold The World* that is a parody of Marc Bolan?
Oh yes. Yes. That was "Black Country Rock". I Bolanised it. I do that to a lot of people.

Apart from the obvious one, "Queen Bitch", which of the others are notably parodic?
I did a lot of Newley things on the very first album I made, *Love You Till Tuesday* [*David Bowie*]. That's a very strange album.

Has it been reissued?
It will be. It's been out once. They brought it out when I had "Space Oddity", but it didn't do so well. I expect they'll bring it out in a few weeks' time. I guarantee they'll bring it out. Other songs? Of course, "Waiting For The

Man". In fact a lot of Lou's material. Especially that one…it sums up a lot of his early writing and that's changed considerably since those days. His new material that we're gonna do will surprise a lot of people. Its miles different from anything he's done before. On "Waiting For The Man" Lou captured, for me better than anyone, the feeling of New York, that area of New York he was living in, and those times.

The other great New York record of our times is "Summer In The City".
I agree. I was a devoted fan of the Spoonful. I loved them. Another record was Mingus' *Oh Yeah*, particularly " Ecclusiastics" which I drew an enormous amount of pleasure from. I felt it very '90s – very 2001 – that whole album. I was into that sort of jazz. Before Santana, I was into the English scene and I was never able to relate to that stuff because of my earlier interest in Coltrane and Mingus, as well. A lot of Zappa's things flatten me, actually.

Any of Zappa's stuff make it with you?
We're Only In It For The Money, because I mean I saw huge potential in that area for Zappa, but I don't understand Zappa and I'm not that intrigued by him to try to unwrap his problems or try to find out why.

Were you ever tempted to get into the James Taylor thing of autobiographical songs?
Yeah, I had a spasm of that, but thank God I got out of it.

Out of all your material, with which songs do you feel most comfortable? D'you ever listen to any of your stuff and think that you could have done it better if you'd done it later?
Oh yes, lots of times. A lot of *Man Who Sold The World*, though that was one of the best albums I made. It was a whole traumatic period.

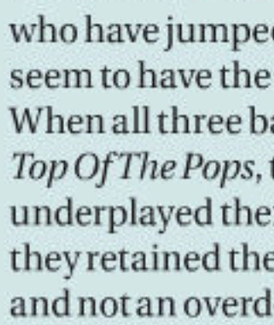
What's gonna be the next post-Ziggy development? Have you started to think about a new album?
No, not at all. I'm still totally involved with Ziggy. I probably will be for a few months, getting it entirely out of my system, and then we'll don another mask.

Thanks a lot, and I hope you and Ziggy will be very happy together.
Oh, no. I hope YOU and Ziggy will be very happy. Ziggy's my gift to you.

It had been the last interview of a long day of raps, zaps and varied craziness, and I was keeping David from an immediate departure to enjoy a fortnight's holiday. So we shook hands and said our farewells. David's all right, you know. He may even be the "shining genius" his ads say he is. Whatever, he's a gas. Long live Ziggy Stardust! We needed him.

"WE'RE ALL VERY CLOSE, BUT NOT AS CLOSE AS HAS BEEN RUMOURED!"

From Hull and back: Bowie's right-hand guitar man **Mick Ronson** on life as a Spider From Mars



"YOU CAN ASK me if I'm bent," said a somewhat subdued Spider from Mars, "but I'll only say no." Not looking in the least bit bent, Mick Ronson had lately suffered at the hands of an interviewer interested in such matters and was prepared for the worst.

The Spiders From Mars are the musicians who work with David Bowie, and who are every bit as outrageous. David once said he has one of the best dressed bands around and he wasn't exaggerating. Now, his ideas in dress are being copied fast. Gary Glitter and Sweet are only two of the bands who have jumped onto the idea, but neither seem to have the grace of Bowie and his boys. When all three bands appeared on last week's *Top Of The Pops*, the Spiders and David underplayed their hand to fine effect, so that they retained the aura of being the real thing, and not an overdone paste glitter imitation.

Neither do the Spiders come over as stooges for David. They are talented musicians in their own right, and the band work as a team.

Mick Ronson, like the rest of the band, comes from Hull. He came to London two-and-a-half years ago, after he and Woody Woodmansey had both been playing in blues band The Rats. Mick heard David was looking for a guitarist and so came down to see him. He was asked to play on David's appearance on the John Peel show, although he didn't know the music, and as things worked out, he stayed. David has much to say in praise of his band, who've been working with him now since *Hunky Dory*.

"I didn't know a lot about Dave before I came down, but I had heard 'Space Oddity' of course and I liked that. I'd been playing in this blues band and just being a serious musician. I'm still serious about my music, but not in impressing just a small group of people. I'm out to impress everybody, make it a show and give them their money's worth.

"We did split up for a while, last year, because everyone was battling against each other musically, but now it's running smoothly."

Bowie's appearances with the band aren't just like any other group's set. He and the Spiders make a production out of it, each person integral to the movement and music.

"We get to a gig very early to set up the sound balance, and the lights, then we eat, taking it steady, then put on the make-up and then roll onstage at the last minute. It all takes about four hours. We build up nicely to it."

It was David who put forward the ideas on clothes to the group, and though they were a bit doubtful at first, they've realised the impact the costumes have on the audience.

"When we were first talking about it, I had a few different ideas, but I was caught on an off-time. I had a lot on my mind. I can get pretty stubborn. Some people think we're bent because of the clothes, but that doesn't worry me. People just like something to talk about. If you want to be successful, you've got to be prepared to do things you might not otherwise do, and be prepared to be talked about. You can't let it affect you.

"Actually it makes me want to be more outrageous, if anything. I like shocking people. We want to excite kids, make them feel good, so they can't take their eyes off the stage."

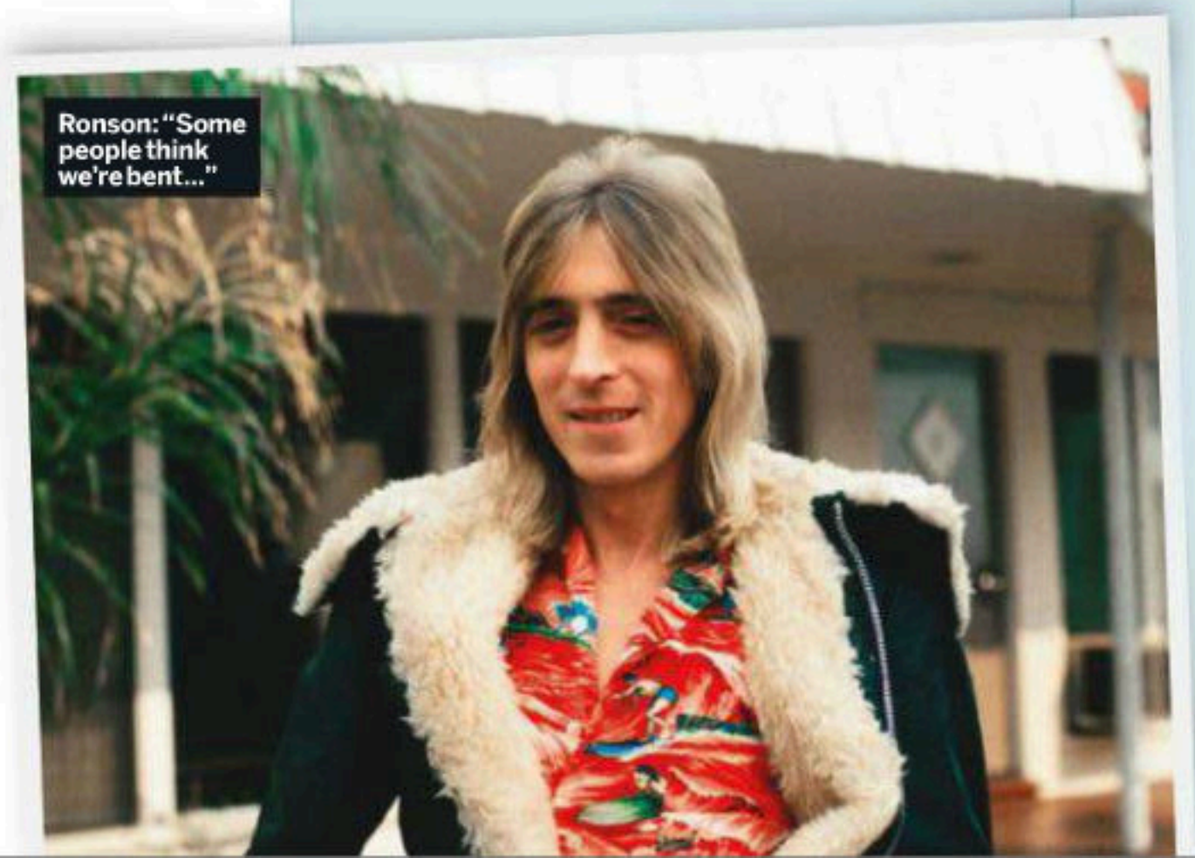
It would appear that this policy is working, as the band get bigger audiences everywhere, with hundreds being turned away, and Bowie finally getting the praise he has deserved for so long. All the adulation for David doesn't affect the feelings of the Spiders at all.

"It doesn't worry us. He's the draw, it's his show. The people come to see Dave. He is an outstanding showman, a true artist. I'm learning a lot. He's taught me how to present a group and to keep it together. If it wasn't for David I'd still be a run-of-the-mill blues musician. We're all very close, but not as close as has been rumoured!"

It has also been rumoured that with a gradual fading of T.Rex publicity, David and the Spiders could ably fill a gap in the entertainment quota.

"Well, Marc had a lot of dedicated fans and he is Bolan, as we're the Spiders. I'd love it if we took off like that. I admire what they've done. Bolan has gone out of the way to give the kids music they can relate to, with simple sequences. I'd like to think we could be different. It's an older audience that we have."

ROSALIND RUSSELL


Ronson: "Some people think we're bent..."

LFI, REX FEATURES

RELEASE DATE 13 | APRIL | 1973

ALADDIN SANE

Eyes turn to America, but faced with a punishing schedule of touring, recording and excess, the actor starts to crack... *By Allan Jones*

ZIGGY STARDUST MADE Bowie a phenomenon in the UK, where he held imperial sway over an audience who in response to Ziggy's beckoning implorations – *"Give me your hands!"* – had gathered around him, drawn by his exotic lure and the chance to dress up. America, where manager Tony DeFries had predicted even greater success, was proving harder to crack. Bowie was slavered over in New York and Los Angeles, elsewhere ignored.

DeFries wasn't to be denied, however. Bowie would break America or be broken by it. Accordingly, DeFries drove Bowie ruthlessly. He was on the road there continuously from October to December 1972, when he returned to the UK for short tour. More American shows followed in January, then dates in Japan that preceded a three-month British tour.

Meanwhile, there was also a growing clamour for the follow-up to *Ziggy* – especially in the UK, where pre-sales of over 100,000 made it the most keenly anticipated album release since the heyday of The Beatles. The Bowie Nation became still more hysterical when he announced its April release and gave it a title during an appearance on Russell Harty's chatshow on January 17, 1973, which also saw him perform "Drive-In Saturday", whose woozy futurist doo-wop was a taster of what was to come.

Bowie looked fantastic performing it, more resplendently flamboyant than ever, if worryingly cadaverous. But in distracted conversation with Harty, he displayed a twitchy nervousness, a wired fatigue that hinted at the toll of recent touring. The new album had also been mostly written and even partly recorded as he careered around America, before sessions at London's Trident Studios, where it was completed, Bowie and Ronson still frantically overdubbing tracks almost until the assault on America resumed on February 14. His schedule was frighteningly intense.

Released on April 13, *Aladdin Sane* went straight to No 1 in the UK, where it stayed for the next five weeks, eventually spending nearly 18 months on the chart. The critical response to it was somewhat cool, however. Much was unflatteringly made of its hurried making, patchwork genesis and songs of disparate origin. For Bowie, though, this was rather the point. *Aladdin Sane*, however obliquely, was a record about personal disintegration in a fragmenting world, the latter seen from the possibly delusional perspective of a rock star increasingly unhinged by fame and all its lavish and eventually destructive attentions.

In the circumstances, Bowie made no attempt to deny the album's piecework assembly. The song titles on the label of the original vinyl pressing, for instance, were followed in brackets by where during the 1972 tour they'd been written. Thus brutal glam stomper "The Jean Genie" was subtitled "Detroit And New York", and worked up from a tour bus jam on the riff from Muddy Waters' "I'm A Man", a '60s blues boom staple usually associated with The Yardbirds. It was recorded in two takes at RCA's New York studios in October and rush-released in the UK in November giving Bowie his biggest hit so far. The savagely lubricious "Cracked Actor (Los Angeles)", meanwhile, was inspired by an orgiastic four day stopover at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and was awash in coital drench and carnal excess.

There were many things that by the end of 1972 were beginning to impact sourly on Bowie – marital breakdown, the realisation that DeFries was fleecing him, a growing remoteness and the infiltration of hard drugs into his life, among them. The album he made in these circumstances, however, betrayed scant evidence of trauma. Contradictorily, it contained some of the most thrilling, diverse and expansive music of his career thus far.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"*Aladdin Sane* is probably the album of the year, and a worthy contribution to the most important body of musical work produced in this decade."

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY, NME, APRIL 24, 1973

"It is clever, but icy cold and I have a feeling that the songs here will not be long remembered."

ALAN LEWIS, MELODY MAKER, APRIL 21, 1973

TRACKMARKS | Aladdin Sane

1 Watch That Man (New York) ★★★★★
2 Aladdin Sane (1913-1938-197?) (RHMS Ellenis) ★★★★
3 Drive-In Saturday (Seattle-Phoenix) ★★★★★
4 Panic In Detroit (Detroit) ★★★★★
5 Cracked Actor (Los Angeles) ★★★★
6 Time (New Orleans) ★★★★
7 The Prettiest Star (Gloucester Road) ★★★
8 Let's Spend The Night Together ★★★★★
9 The Jean Genie (Detroit And New York) ★★★★
10 Lady Grinning Soul (London) ★★★

RELEASED: April 13, 1973
LABEL: RCA
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie and Ken Scott
RECORDED: Trident Studios, London
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (guitar, harmonica, keyboards, saxophone, vocals); Mick Ronson (guitar, piano, vocals); Trevor Bolder (bass), Mick "Woody" Woodmansey (drums); Mike Garson (piano); Ken Fordham (saxophone); Brian "Bux" Wilshaw (saxophone, flute); Linda Lewis (backing vocals); Juanita "Honey" Franklin (backing vocals); GA MacCormack (backing vocals)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 17

The Stones' hedonistic abandon now emerged as a major influence. Swaggering album opener "Watch That Man" was a brilliant replication of the dissolute cacophony the Stones had essayed on *Exile On Main Street*, the Spiders augmented by wailing backing singers and slutty horns. There was also an ejaculatory cover of "Let's Spend The Night Together", that turned the original's raunchy heterosexuality into something thrillingly transgressive. It was an open invitation to fuck, basically, gender irrelevant.

The most startling addition to Bowie's sonic arsenal on *Aladdin Sane* was Mike Garson, a 24-year old New York pianist recommended to Bowie by jazz composer Annette Peacock. Garson's mesmerising keyboards added a decadent lustre to the album's title track, which Bowie surrendered to him for a famously improvised solo in whose shattering disorder, which he encouraged, Bowie seemed to recognise aspects of his own increasingly restless agitation. Garson was all over "Time", too, bringing a torrid theatricality to one of the most overwrought cuts in the Bowie canon. He was featured as prominently on closing ballad "Lady Grinning Soul".

Most Bowie songs about the future usually erred towards the bleak, mainly because he didn't believe we had one. But "Drive-In Saturday" here was a surprisingly benign look forward, a wry song about people being reminded of how to have sex by watching old movies from a more easily promiscuous time *"when people looked in Jagger's eyes and scored"*. The thunderously jittery "Panic In Detroit", about a charismatic revolutionary (possibly based on MC5 manager John Sinclair committing suicide), occupied a more apocalyptic landscape, familiar from "Running Gun Blues", say, or "Five Years", whose doomsday reportage it especially recalled.

Ziggy Stardust had ended with the communal hug of "Rock'N'Roll Suicide" – *"You're not alone!"* – but it had no equivalent here. Bowie's self-proclaimed synonymity with his audience was, in fact, faltering, about to expire. After 18 months on the road, he was exhausted, restless and bored with what he had become. It was time to move on. On July 3 at London's Hammersmith Odeon, on the last night of a 40-date UK tour, in a last dramatic act of the Ziggy-Aladdin glam era, Bowie effectively killed off his most fabulous creations to create a future for himself in which he could be many more people.

Which left the questions, where would he go next and who would he be when he got there?

"I FEEL LIKE DR FRANKENSTEIN. WHAT HAVE I CREATED?"

After a year of Ziggy, Bowie has changed. ROY HOLLINGWORTH finds him on a French train: paranoid, exhausted, assailed by mysterious pains and ready to leave his decadent creation behind. "A more mature David Bowie"?

TAKEN FROM MELODY MAKER 12/05/1973

CHARING CROSS STATION, London, 9.10pm. And when he arrived they screamed and they cried, and they rushed, and they gushed forth and beat their feverish feminine fists into the backs of the indeed brave coppers who shielded HIM. For he is indeed HIM.

One girl, her face bloated, and most ugly with tears and ruddy emotion, fell halfway twixt train and rail. A young copper dragged her to safety. Ten yards down the platform HE was pretty close to injury, too.

Bowie, despite, all the fierce bodyguarding, was being kissed, pinched, touched, ripped at. His hair now untidy; his eyes wild; his mouth open. A picture of terror. But his open mouth also bore the shadow of a crazed smile. They pushed him against a carriage door.

It took Spartan constabulary to lift this small squirrel-haired figure to safety; his face now very creased with every emotion a face could ever squeeze itself into. And they squeezed him into a car that was battered and clawed at. And that car squeezed its way to safety. And Mr Bowie was back in England.

And on Platform One, in a dirty wet huddle, lay two plumpish girlies, crying, and holding each other. Everyone had gone, except they. Their tights all ripped, their knickers showing. They just lay there… crying.

That, my friends, is actually the end of the story. This arrival; this sweaty, shocking, swift and severe welcome home for Bowie, back from Japan, 7,000 miles by boat and train because… because he won't fly.

Via Trans-Siberian Express, he "Bowied" Moscow travelling "soft" in first class. Second class is called "hard". "And indeed is hard," said Bowie.

Four-and-a-half months away from England. He travelled the world, and, unlike the rest, saw its people. No in and out of a hotel, and onto a plane. He saw the people. And now Mr Bowie is a very changed man. And PEOPLE are going to kill him with his concern for them. No amateur dramatics. Mr Bowie is concerned.

So where does the story begin?

It begins in Terminal One lounge Heathrow Airport, waiting, seeing heavy rain spatter the runway / Delay on flight / Bad weather / We have to find Bowie in Paris / Had to be found / BEA departure to Paris / "Will passengers avoid treading heavily on the gangplank as it is waterlogged" / Captain Black in charge / Thunderstorm over Paris / Trident One hit by lightning three times / Lands on a runway fit for a trawler.

Now you see why Bowie doesn't fly?

So where do we find him?

We find him at The George V Hotel – we don't see him, but we find him. A porter – out for a swift five francs – shows us to the Rouge Room where a Bowie reception was held. It was held. He lights a match. "*Monsieur Bowie ees not 'ere.*" Nobody was there. The room was as black as a Guinness. We phone around.

I find – on the phone – Leee Black Childers. Now Leee was the *MM*'s

CONTINUES OVER»

GETTY IMAGES

photographer in New York, but when Bowie appeared in New York, he became Bowie's photographer. I was annoyed – but not deeply.

"Yeah, David's here / Russia wow / They loved him / Geee they tried to take away my cameras / We've had such fun / Why don't you see Cherry Vanilla?"

Now the last time I saw Cherry Vanilla was in a hotel room in New York where she preyed over a table like a vulture preys over the bones of fat explorers.

An ex-film starlet and groupie with much body and much voice. Now Bowie's "press aid". She ordered a table of things for me. Mostly wine. Which was never drunk. At £7 a bottle that might annoy people.

"Bowie was arriving in New York, and I was a groupie. And I knew the press. Christ I was a groupie." (She split her nightdress to reveal nothing underneath). "And there I was, and Mr Bowie gave me a job."

What job did he give you, dear?

"His Press Lady."

How is he?

"Gee darling, I wish I knew."

I now know that it is in fact true that one can live in splendour doing not the slightest damned thing. Cherry Vanilled on. I left, and went to bed. £30 per night for a single room.

THE VERY NEXT morning Bowie was supposed to catch the 12.30 Paris-Victoria train. There's not even a twinkle from his room. Breakfast, £3 and then a cab to Paris Nord Station.

We don't know whether the lad is on the train or not. He hadn't left the hotel. I run the length of the train – 22 coaches in search of the squirrel-haired kid. Twenty-two coaches and he wasn't on it.

Mission impossible.

So Barrie Wentzell and I wait, somewhat dazed, awfully broke, and listening to the chatter on the intercom. It's no different from Charing Cross, my dears, except that they announce trains for Lyons instead of Tunbridge Wells. And the porters smoke Gitanes in preference to No 6.

And then, as the sunlight split the smoke of several hundred porters, there appeared in all innocence and in a neat suit of silver and purples, David Bowie, fresh from a limousine and with that delightful wife of his, Angie. "The most remarkable woman on Earth," says David. She might well be.

"So we've missed the bleedin' train," says David looking at Platform 4 all empty, all empty like, and trainless.

"Never mind dear," says Angie. "There's another soon," and she wiggles her American bottom, and vanishes to the inquiry desk.

"Seven thousand miles," says David, smiling, and very, very fresh. "And we miss the bleedin' train on the last lap. From Japan to Paris and we miss the train."

Well, we couldn't catch the next one for that involved a flight to Gatwick. And the next one involved taking a hovercraft from Boulogne to Dover. "Can't do it," says Bowie. "If it flies, it's death."

But David, it only flies a few inches above sea level.

"Then, for the first time in years I shall leave the land," says Bowie.

Later we board the train and he's talking away. About music?

No, my people. About the fate of the world.

HE TALKED ABOUT the fate of the world for approximately two hours. Well, not just he, but we. "I have feelings that I know just what is going on, I have feelings."

The train rattles through Monsieur or somewhere like that. "I might put them into songs. You know, those feelings."

Bowie still chain smokes (almost everybody else's ciggies, not his own). Leee Childers lives behind his reflecting sun shades. Cherry Vanilla vanillas on. Angie Bowie smiles, and is indeed very lovely.

"You see, Roy," said Bowie softly, looking straight at me, dead eyed, a can of beer acting as the microphone. "I've gone through a lot of changes. A whole lot of changes. It's all happened on my way back from Japan. You see, Roy, I've seen life, and I think I know who's controlling this damned world.

"And after what I've seen of the state of this world, I've never been so damned scared."

Are you going to write about it?

"If I did it would be my last album ever."

You mean that?

"It would have to be my last album ever."

Why?

"Because I don't think I'd be around after recording it."

Are you ill?

"I believe I am. I have a very strange pain in my right-hand side. I've had it for a year. It's a pain that now has to be taken to a specialist."

His eyes are full of menace now – mainly

That was the age of the train: Bowie aboard the boat train to London, May 1973

BARRIE WENTZELL

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Aladdin Sane's title track was originally appended by "(1913-1938-197?) – HRMS *Ellinis*" – a doomy reference to the years prior to the breakout of World War, and the ship on which the song was written. *Ellinis* was a refitted luxury ocean liner that had been en route from Honolulu when Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941 ...

No fly zone: Bowie the aviophobe, with Angie, 1973

because his belly's full of beer, which we all constantly drink. We pass a field of French beef, and Bowie starts to cough, and cough, and he can't stop. "The cough darling?" inquires Angie. Bowie answered her with this deep, frightening cough which starts somewhere in his stomach!

"The changes I've seen, they have to be written about."

Then YOU write them David! (I say).

"Yes (*cough*), I suppose somebody must (*cough*). I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders."

Yes, he could actually carry the world on his shoulders. It's all down to the cut of the jacket. The shoulders are very big.

My memory goes back to the platform on Paris Nord. They're piping out the music to *Last Tango In Paris*. We were walking along, together, and talking about Lou Reed. "He's so damned fine," says Bowie.

"And they throw up all this mystery around him, this bloody silliness. Can't they understand he's just a New York cat, and that is JUST what he is. You know, it would be so nice if people would be able to see that beneath it all – we're all easy people."

They'd never believe it, David. They wouldn't want to.

"Maybe you're right. But we are easy people. And maybe in a lot of ways… very simple. If only they could see. Oh God, this intellectual confusion that surrounds us all. Why, why… why?"

He carried his suitcase. "I know I'm sick of being Gulliver. You know, after America, Moscow, Siberia, Japan. I just want to bloody well go home to Beckenham, and watch the telly."

But back to the train. The talk of the state of the world continued, and became intense, and deep. We pooled our experiences. Shared thoughts, ideas.

"You know," said David. "The rock revolution did happen. It really did. Trouble was, nobody realised when it happened. We have to realise now. Let me tell you, the 'underground' is alive and well – more alive than it has ever been."

THE TRAIN RASPED, and clanked to a halt at Boulogne. Leee Childers and most of the party thought it was Calais – but it didn't really matter.

"Oh, the seaside, how very lovely. How nice," said Bowie kicking his shoes into the sand that surrounds the Hover-Port.

But then fear struck his face as he saw his next line of transport arrive.

The Channel was clear, and like (as they say) a millpond. The sun was strong, and clean, and then this thing roared into sight. It was like a sperm whale with propellers. And was very noisy. And most monstrous. "Oh no," said David.

"Oh yes," said Angie. "They don't hurt."

"But they fly."

Only inches above the sea, David.

He sat, and hardly said a word during the "flight". He was worried. But it was safe. At the Hover-Port he'd met a couple of girlies. Sweet little things on a day trip to France. And they'd seen Bowie. And he talked to them, and signed their fag packets. They pinched themselves to see if it was real.

DOVER. THE WHITE cliffs now actually amber as the sun sets. His feet on English soil. A waiting room on Dover station. He had a cup of tea and a BR sausage roll. And then he talked, so nicely, to the girls on the platform.

"IT WAS THE MELODY MAKER THAT MADE ME. THAT PIECE BY MICK WATTS. I BECAME A PERFORMER AFTER THAT"

"Roy, they're the salt of the earth, those girls. They don't sit each night and compare notes on groups, criticising lyrics, asking if it's valid. They just play the record… yeah, and maybe they dance. I love them. I love them dearly."

More beer cans emerge as the train (a slow one) leaves Dover.

Miss Vanilla is asleep. So is Mrs Bowie. David reads the London *Evening Standard* – and gets back into British Things. He laughs and laughs. What a funny little country we are.

"I've got to work harder this year than I've ever worked. You know that?" he'd said earlier twixt train and hovercraft. "We're going to do a 79-date tour of America this year in about as many days. I might die. But I have to do it.

"I mean, you know the Spiders have only played about 50 dates altogether? About time we started working, I feel."

Through lavish English countryside the train trundled on. David and myself retire to a less crowded compartment. In fact… we're on our own. Alone, together. "Are you aware of what you're going back to on this train, David?

"Er, not really. No. Four-and-a-half months away has put me out of touch with what you might call the English rock scene.

"I know that every little bag that we've been in up to now has been incredibly exciting. But now… well, we've reached this position and it doesn't leave one with a clear mind as to what to do next."

"But now I'm home, and after 10 minutes I'm starting to feel British again. When I'm away, I try to divorce myself from that. Don't ask me why. I suppose I just want to be Ziggy."

DAVID, SINCE YOU'VE been away, a word called "decadence" has crept into rock, and is now used by every rock writer. And David, you have been held to blame for this "decadence". He smiles.

"Yes… er, I can imagine that."

He smiles.

"What do you have to say about it, Roy? Am I responsible for it?" he inquires.

Well, I was in the States when YOU happened. I just read in *MM* that you had arrived, and it was decadent rock. I saw a picture of you and I thought 'What the…?'

Bowie laughs. "Yeah, it was *Melody Maker* that made me. It was that piece by Mick Watts. I became a performer after that. That's true. It was the first time I had talked to the press about wanting to come back onstage and be a performer rather than a writer. During the interview I really saw that I wanted to perform again."

And did you expect it to come this far?

"No, never. I was a non-performing artist, excited about working onstage again and, well… it all exploded."

"We moved at such intensity, such speed. I wrote so quickly. It wasn't until months after that I realised what I'd been writing. When the last period finished I sat back, and went 'wow'. It took the wind totally out of my sails."

But you seem OK. Very normal.

"Oh, of course I am. I mean this decadence is just a bloody joke. I'm very normal."

(*Conversation is lost in a tunnel.*)

"I mean this so-called decadent thing happening in English rock. Is it really decadence? Is it what I would call decadence?"

How would you define decadence, David?

"Not putting a white rose on a white table for fear of the thorn scratching the table."

I see, I did.

CONTINUES OVER»

GETTY IMAGES

"I don't really feel that decadent rock has arrived… yet. It will do."

How do you feel about Roxy Music?

"Well, maybe they are the nearest thing to being decadent at the moment. And I love them. I really love them. I'm going to buy their new album tomorrow. That's the first thing I'm going to do."

What sort of person do you find yourself now. You talk of illness, and you want to work harder (at the Parisian café he told me he had NO death wish). But what are you now?

"I am me and I have to carry on with what I've started. There is nothing else for me to do. I have been under a great strain, I have also become disillusioned with certain things."

Like what?

"Well it's very hard to say, but I never believed a hype could be made of an artist before that artist had got anywhere. That's what happened, you see. I didn't like it. But when I saw that our albums were really selling, I knew that period was over. The hype was over. Well, it wasn't, but at least we'd done something to be hyped about. Dig?"

Yes.

"But that whole hype thing at the start was a monster to endure. It hurt me quite a lot. I had to go through a lot of crap. I mean, I never thought Ziggy would become the most talked about man in the world. I never thought it would become that unreal.

"I don't want to be studied as a boy next door type character… nor weird. I want to maintain a balance between both.

"The characters I have written about have indeed been the roles I have wished to portray. Ziggy – that dear creature, I loved him. I feel somewhat like a Dr Frankenstein. Although Ziggy follows David Bowie very closely, they are indeed two different people. What have I created?

"Ziggy hit the nail on the head. He just came at the rightest, ripest time," he added. He smiled at me. I like him.

"Dylan once said of writers that they just pluck things from the air, and put them down. Later you can look back on them and read into them. I pluck from the air… it's only later that I see what I've plucked.

"I know that I appear to write ahead of myself. I mean, let's take *Aladdin Sane*. What was written then was written quickly, and really, without much thought as to what it was about.

"But now I sit back and look at those lyrics and look at that album, and it's very valid y'know. Sure I have concepts. I have storylines for the albums, but the actual thought, the actual inspiration comes suddenly, and is written as it comes.

"What keeps me together, what shoulders those "escapades" of mine is this dear woman, Angie, who knows David Bowie… eh, she knows me better than I do."

Wherever we travelled, each station, each town, there were few spare minutes when he didn't hug, kiss and point at this lady, and say, loudly, "She's the greatest."

"He gets very evil after a few beers. I mean Roy, look at his face now – he's Jean Genie, he's a little villain. But he's lovely," said Angie, looking after us all. One remarkable woman.

"It's not a death wish that I have, Roy, although the very fact that I say that means that the thought enters my mind. But, y'know, we're all very normal. And it's about time we told people so.

"Otherwise, what those kids are aiming for – I mean the revolution – is going to melt away. It's now we have to revolt. But, Roy, sensibly… and with thought."

DO YOU FEEL you are a statesman – or a performer?

"I don't ever want to be a statesman, Roy. I am a performer and I leave space on that stage for theatre, too. But a statesman. No. I know only a thin line separates a songwriter from being an entertainer or making statements. I realise my responsibilities."

"With Ziggy, I became Ziggy on stage. I really was. That was my ego." (*This statement followed the entrance and emergence of another tunnel*).

"I HAVE TO CARRY ON WITH WHAT I'VE STARTED. THERE IS NOTHING ELSE FOR ME TO DO…"

And what is your ego now?

"Strong, and getting fiercer, but I don't think it's Ziggy anymore. It's a more mature David Bowie."

You mean mature as being calmer?

"Yes, more aware, more in control of myself. I think that's good. That will keep me alive.

"I have no idea what I look like onstage. I have never seen a film. I just don't know what I look like when I become 'that thing'. I must see a film of myself. It is essential.

"I can't wait to see what we actually are.

"I know that visually the band is going to be reducing. I mean everyone's wearing make-up, ain't they. Eh? I know that we are going to reduce on that level. It will still be David Bowie and The Spiders though.

"I know I have created a somewhat strange audience – but it's also full of little Noddy Holders, and little Iggy Pops. I know we used to attract a lot of 'queens' at one stage but then other factions of people crept in. Now you can't tell. They're all there for some reason.

"And we get young people. Those lovely young people. And they have to be considered very seriously. They cannot be forgotten – as they might be. We cannot afford to lose them by continuing to make rock a cultural force.

"We must not leave the young behind. I repeat that.

"You see, I don't want to aim statements at them. Being a statesman is abhorrent to me."

And then the train stopped. We looked at each other. It was Charing Cross. We smiled.

THE FAREWELL GIG

"Bowie has saved himself, and the futures of his few million followers…"

TAKEN FROM MELODY MAKER 14/07/1973

THERE WAS NOTHING sad about Bowie's farewell concert at London's Hammersmith Odeon.

He was immensely enjoyable that night. A star. A genius. And his music was brilliant. Yet I'll shed no tear over his departure.

You see, Bowie has saved himself, and by doing that has hopefully saved the futures of his few million followers. They are already weird. Given time they would have gone mad. Bowie had created a monster. We were all ready to drink from the cup of decadence. Trouble is, few knew when to stop.

I'm stood in the foyer of the Hammersmith Odeon, and I'm looking at a dozen Bowie lookalikes, who stand opposite, sneering and posing. They sneer upon those who feel they don't look as good as they do.

This has always happened at rock concerts. I've seen them dress like Mick Jagger, Bolan and Slade. But the people who did that were fun. Here the vibe was pitiful.

It's horrible to see individuals stripped of their individuality to the extent that they believe every thing that HE sings about, or believe that HE is right.

Jagger was rebellion, and it's good to have rebels. But to follow someone like Bowie is following decadence. That ain't rebelling, it's giving in. It's giving in to the extent that a kid should see *A Clockwork Orange* and then kick a tramp to death. It's giving in to the extent that one should read *1984* and do nothing but follow it.

Those works were meant as a warning. Now did you take heed of David Bowie?

Do you really think perversion is fun? Think about it. If what Bowie did onstage became reality on the street, it would not be very pleasant.

Already, as I stand here in this foyer, I see Bowie's stage expanded to contain most of the people here. In a way, it's evil. I feel SCARED. These fans have given Bowie everything, but forgotten themselves.

Is Bowie really being truthful when he say's he's quitting? I really hope he is, but if someone offered Tony DeFries £1,000,000 to play America, would he refuse?

To be very famous one has to pull many tricks these days. And however lovely Bowie

"The last show we'll ever do..." Bowie – and deranged fans – at Hammersmith Odeon, July 3, 1973

is in *your* eyes, don't ever think he won't pull tricks. To survive, he has to.

Bowie is a sight more clever than Bolan, who continued to believe he could win every match. It just doesn't work. On that level, Bowie's "quitting" is simply good business.

But I'm gullible enough to believe he hasn't done it for that reason. I do believe he CARES.

But all of these thoughts have left my head as I sit down in the Odeon and hopefully wait to see and hear a unique artist. I try to ignore all the posers who sit alongside me. Despite the fact that I FEEL Bowie's music, I do not FEEL these people, except like a pillow over my face.

But you can't ignore what's going on. You can't help but notice a kid of 14 smoking a joint. Hell, I'm not soft, but that turned my gut.

They put Bowie's pianist on first. His name's Mike Garson, he's dressed in a fairy tale outfit, and played sort of avant-garde Mantovani arrangements of David's hits. All very soapy, and we yawned.

But then it was real horrorshow (excuse the fashionable phrase) as David took the stage with the strobes and that glorious Ludwig Van. The adrenalin flows, and so does the audience, all over the seats. It's not because it's all too much, 'cos it isn't yet. All these kids are doing is acting out what you're supposed to do at a rock concert. Two blokes behind me shake their heads like dervishes. "Idiot dancing", indeed.

They are not really there for the music. During all Bowie's numbers there were constant conversations going on. The drama was forced. It was rather like pretending to make love, but not doing it properly because they didn't want to mess their hair.

Bowie himself, well you've had him described enough by now. Very frightening, and also very soft. His movements, his style, his charisma, is not what you would call human. He is as DeFries once said, "a real star". Bowie could stand onstage and pick his nose, and he'd still be quite great.

He was very good, and I enjoyed him tremendously, even though his voice sounded tired and lost in places.

I began to enjoy the show with "White Light/White Heat". He was noticeably happier singing that, as he was when Jeff Beck joined him onstage. Beck looked really out of place. Dreadfully dull in just jeans and a casual top.

Mick Ronson is an avowed admirer of Beck. Indeed, he appeared to be in heat for the lad. I mean, on a couple of occasions he tried the old loose hand on Jeff, and even an attempt at a kiss. But Jeff, about as butch as meat pie, didn't really want to know about it.

Ronson did push Beck to the forefront during "The Jean Genie". Jeff obliged by playing guitar behind his head.

The sight of Beck wiggling against Bowie was rather like putting Sid James up with Marlene Dietrich. But Beck did indeed add some amazing guitar.

By this time the whole floor was up on its feet, and the joint was rocking. Bowie, in a see-through black top, bullet belt and plain black trousers, a pleasant change from his outrageous wedding-cake wardrobe, was grinning like a 12-year-old kid at the circus.

He had good reason. The lad's worked his way from nowt. It's a shame that the cult surrounding him grew to be so wicked, which Bowie isn't. He's a right little charmer, and a splendid actor.

Despite what you've read, there wasn't all that much croaking as he announced this was the final concert he'd do. Flushed girls dropped to the floor with shock... a flushed, fat bouncer sighed "Thank God!"... And a flushed Mick Ronson continued to pester a cool Jeff Beck. Bowie just looked cute. It was "Rock'n'Roll Suicide", befitting and quite dramatic, and "*Oh David don't*" and "*Please stay*" could be heard amid applause and cheering.

But don't worry. He'll be back, when everyone's calmed down, and levelled off. It's just tactics. Remember, just tactics.

ROY HOLLINGWORTH

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Many claimed to have been present at Ziggy's retirement gig at Hammersmith Odeon on July 3, 1973, but future Sex Pistol Steve Jones went one better by claiming he stole microphones and PA equipment, too. Bowie bears no grudges, though, apparently finding the entire escapade "hilarious".

REX FEATURES; ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPER GROUP

RELEASE DATE 19 | OCTOBER | 1973

PINUPS

High-concept projects are put on hold, as Bowie constructs a mixtape from the favourite songs of young David Jones.

By Andrew Mueller

COVERS ALBUMS ARE usually a symptom of one of two common artistic malaises. One, most straightforwardly, is a dearth of ideas to call one's own. The other, more commonly, is hubris – a desperation to present the act in question as somehow the equal of the (almost invariably venerable) material being interpreted.

David Bowie's 1973 covers album is unusual in displaying neither of these manifestations of stasis. Bowie was hardly, at this point, running on fumes: *Pinups* was bunged out more or less at the peak of his pomp, six months after *Aladdin Sane*, six months before *Diamond Dogs*. And the songs on *Pinups* are clearly selected for no better reason – like there is any better reason – than being personally beloved by Bowie. His scrawl on the cover amounts to the least complex statement of his career: "These songs are among my favourites from the '64-'67 period of London."

At which point the searcher for clues to Bowie's inner motivation can put down the magnifying glass. It's 1973. David Bowie, all of 26 at this point, has already been, on successive releases, a paranoid spaceman, a cross-dressing crooner, a precocious Warhol acolyte, an alien rock god and a schizoid glam strutter. An urge to reconnect with a still earlier incarnation – the chirpy, uncomplicated David Jones, itinerant Mick Jagger wannabe, purveyor of cheerful, straightforward rhythm'n'blues in sweaty London dives – may amount to the least deranged and stressful career move which has occurred to him in a good while. It cannot be insignificant that Bowie is pictured in most of the cover artwork clutching a saxophone – the first instrument he'd learnt, long before the world knew his name, and longer before he'd started inventing other worlds entirely.

Interesting though *Pinups* is in the context of Bowie's lineage, the real reason that the album has endured so well is that *Pinups* is a hoot: a joyful, swaggering romp by a nigh peerless rock'n'roll group, audibly relishing the suspension of Bowie's conceptual burdens. Bowie's choice of songs that mostly weren't already ubiquitous hits also lends proceedings a guileless, intimate thrill: this is an (already) monumentally famous and important rock star playing his own mixtape, evangelising about songs that he happens to think deserve better than echoing to a fade off the dank walls of the Marquee.

Pinups charges out of the gate with "Rosalyn", a seething Bo Diddley boogie previously recorded by indefatigable journeymen The Pretty Things. Over the yelps of Mick Ronson's slide guitar, Bowie defines his vocal persona for the rest of the album – a snarling, spitting bruiser, altogether disdainful of the sort of melodramatic affectations which have characterised the rest of Bowie's output to this point. It's succeeded by "Here Comes The Night", the Bert Berns standard already a hit for Van Morrison's Them. Bowie allows himself a sleight-of-hand here, heroically souping up the choruses into full-on Spiders From Mars histrionics, but the verses are, once again, snotty punk rock. And what Bowie's saxophone solo lacks in fluidity, it compensates in exuberance.

Parameters established, the giddy tear-up continues. "I Wish You Would" further trashes The Yardbirds' trashing of Billy Boy Arnold's priapic blues devotional, plastering it with what might be Ronson's most manic solo.

"Don't Bring Me Down" is also triumphantly heisted from The Pretty Things. Even the poppier moments – versions of The Yardbirds' "Shapes Of Things" and The McCoys' "Sorrow", a hit in the UK for the Merseys in April 1966 – sound suffused with the delirious, wild-eyed joy of someone who can't recall the

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"I think it clearly emphasises his brilliance as a stylist and innovator of modes, which is where his true originality lies."
MICHAEL WATTS, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 20, 1973

"He's produced yet another record that fails to live up to its manifest promise... I can foresee nothing but artistic frustration for Bowie in the next few years."
IAN MACDONALD, NME, OCTOBER 20, 1973

TRACKMARKS | Pinups

1. **Rosalyn** ★★★★
2. **Here Comes The Night** ★★★
3. **I Wish You Would** ★★★★
4. **See Emily Play** ★★★
5. **Everything's Alright** ★★★★
6. **I Can't Explain** ★★
7. **Friday On My Mind** ★★★★★
8. **Sorrow** ★★★★
9. **Don't Bring Me Down** ★★★★
10. **Shapes Of Things** ★★★
11. **Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere** ★★★★
12. **Where Have All The Good Times Gone** ★★★★

RELEASED: October 19, 1973

LABEL: RCA
PRODUCED BY: Ken Scott, David Bowie
RECORDED AT: Château d'Hérouville, Hérouville, France
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, tenor and alto sax, harmonica, arrangements, bk vocals, Moog synthesiser); Mick Ronson (guitar, piano, vocals, arrangements); Trevor Bolder (bass); Aynsley Dunbar (drums); Mike Garson (piano, organ, harpsichord, electric piano); Ken Fordham (baritone saxophone); G A MacCormack (bk vocals).
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 23

last time he had this much fun, and isn't sure when the next opportunity will present itself.

Pinups is not exclusively an uninhibited garage-rattling rave – which is actually kind of a shame, as the album's only duff moments are its slightly self-conscious essays at iconoclasm. The lugubrious slowed-down version of The Who's "I Can't Explain" merely sounds like the original played at the wrong speed, and seems to go on half an hour longer than its two minutes and 11 seconds (a faithful and sprightly version of The Who's "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere", later on *Pinups*, more or less settles the debt). Pink Floyd's woozy psychedelic whimsy "See Emily Play" gets unconvincingly recast as a stackheeled glam extravaganza, interrupted by a hysterical violin-and-piano freakout.

In keeping with the time-honoured strictures of the mixtape, Bowie is also careful to include the odd obscurity, serving up The Mojos' lone hit, "Everything's Alright", with lashings of honky-tonk piano, heavy breathing choruses, more uproariously unsubtle saxophone, and a lead vocal which sounds, at least during the verses, like a camp parody of Robert Plant. It is also Bowie's memory for one-hit wonders that yields the clear highlight of *Pinups* – a wondrous version of The Easybeats' "Friday On My Mind", in which Bowie digs beneath the beery amiability of the original, shifts down a gear for the first part of the chorus, ratchets up his vocal to high preen, turns Ronson entirely loose and conjures a minor classic of demented psychedelic pop.

Though *Pinups* is essentially an exultant frolic, it is also – like so much truly great pop music, of course – shot through with melancholy. It's Bowie coming up from the depths to swallow a lungful of fresh air before returning to his exhaustive, exhausting explorations of the grimmest reaches of fame and artifice, and he knows it. It cannot be coincidental that he closes *Pinups* with The Kinks' "Where Have All The Good Times Gone" even the Jaggeresque over-enunciating of every vowel in the chorus, and Ronson's growling, squealing guitar cannot occlude the sorrow Bowie identifies within Ray Davies' elegy to an easier, more innocent time before that awkward moment at which ambition is introduced to knowledge.

Not for the first or last time, Bowie appears on the cover wearing a mask. It's possibly the only time, however, that we know for sure who is underneath it: David Jones, a teenager from south London, who thinks he wants to be a rock star when he grows up.

RELEASE DATE 24 | APRIL | 1974

DIAMOND DOGS

The darkness falls. A heavy and frequently terrifying drive to Dystopia.

By Graeme Thomson

IF *PINUPS*, RELEASED only months previously, was an attempt to harness the youthful energy and optimism of more innocent times, *Diamond Dogs* arrives wrapped in a wraith-like premonition of Leonard Cohen's prophecy: "*I've seen the future, brother, and it's murder.*"

The gateway to the bleak, bleached intensity of his coked-out mid-'70s period, David Bowie's eighth album is "a future song" in several respects. In terms of his working methods, *Diamond Dogs* marks a clear turning point. With The Spiders exiled back to Mars, Bowie cut a more detached figure, working intensively over longer hours in relative isolation. Augmented by a small band of session men, including Mike Garson on keyboards and Herbie Flowers on bass, he took on production duties and assumed personal responsibility for the bulk of the music.

Ziggy has gone, too. On the title track he's briefly reincarnated as Hallowe'en Jack, a "*cool cat*" rooftop urchin, but in reality Bowie's alien construct already belongs to the past. The cover portrait by Belgian artist Guy Peellaert, creator of *Rock Dreams*, shows the singer as a human-canine mutation with its genitals airbrushed out, and provides the final sighting of Ziggy's famous spiky orange hairdo. Bowie, it seems, had other people he wanted to be.

Recorded in late 1973 and early 1974 at Olympic, London and Ludolf Studios in Hilversum, Holland, *Diamond Dogs* has its roots in Bowie's ambitious plan to bring Orwell's *1984* to the stage. He was refused permission to do so, and although the album retains traces of that original vision ("1984", "We Are The Dead" and "Big Brother" link directly back to the book) its fractured, futuristic narrative ultimately bends to its own will.

Bowie uses Orwell's Airstrip One, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, William Burroughs' squalid Chicago, a ravaged Dickensian London and that ever-reliable source, *A Clockwork Orange*, as launchpads for his own nightmarish cityscape, Hunger City. A dystopian blend of some scavenged past and blighted, imagined future, feral proto-punk urchins inhabit its rooftops and ruins. Even "Rebel Rebel", one of Bowie's most accessible singles and the album's lightest moment by far, retains more than a hint of this ragged, snaggle-toothed vagrancy.

Hunger City sounds suspiciously like a map of Bowie's increasingly fractured psychic terrain. Alienation had always been an integral part of his work, but the combination of fame and a burgeoning appetite for cocaine stripped much of the mischief from his music, making it a far darker, heavier experience. "Future Legend" starts with a disembodied synthetic howl and describes a city literally gone to the dogs, Bowie intoning an escalating vision of horror over a butchered version of the old Broadway standard "Bewitched, Bothered And Bewildered". This, it is immediately clear, is an album travelling a straight road to hell.

The music itself is Janus-like. There are ghostly remnants of glam in the crunchy rockers, harking back to "Watch That Man" and "Let's Spend The Night Together" from *Aladdin Sane*. The Stones were recording *It's Only Rock'N'Roll* at Hilversum while Bowie was in situ, and their influence is clear in the title track, a bawdy boogie in which "fog" is rendered, Jagger-like, as "*fawg*". "Rebel Rebel", too, with its killer Keef-influenced riff and shouty, Stonesy vocal, is the last in a line of classic Bowie rockers which includes "Suffragette City" and "The Jean Genie". Reputedly handling all the guitar parts (excepting Alan Parker's funk workout on "1984"), Bowie's non-virtuoso playing lends a sinewy, ragged urgency to the songs.

So much for the past. Much of *Diamond Dogs* is transitionary, clearing a path to the

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Excellent...he's adopted a 'wall of sound' technique, borrowed not a little from Phil Spector, but the richness enhances his voice no end."

CHRIS CHARLESWORTH, MELODY MAKER, MAY 11, 1974

"I'd guess it will turn out to be a success ... as for your reviewer, he was left steeped in impotent caution, conscious that he hadn't really been moved by it at all."

IAN MACDONALD, NME, MAY 11, 1974

TRACKMARKS | Diamond Dogs

1. **Future Legend** ★★★★
2. **Diamond Dogs** ★★★★
3. **Sweet Thing** ★★★★★
4. **Candidate** ★★★★★
5. **Sweet Thing (Reprise)** ★★★★★
6. **Rebel Rebel** ★★★★
7. **Rock 'N Roll With Me** ★★★★
8. **We Are The Dead** ★★★★
9. **1984** ★★★★
9. **Big Brother** ★★★★
10. **Chant Of The Ever Circling Skeletal Family** ★★★

RELEASED: April 24 1974
LABEL: RCA
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie
RECORDED AT: Olympic Studios and Island Studios, London and Ludolf Studios, Hilversum, Netherlands
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitars, saxes, Moog synth, Mellotron); Mike Garson (keyboards); Herbie Flowers (bass); Tony Newman (drums); Aynsley Dunbar (drums); Alan Parker (guitar on "1984").
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 5

experimentation that defined Bowie's work in the second half of the '70s. Having patched up his friendship with former producer Tony Visconti, they ended up mixing the album together, reigniting a relationship which was to have a significant impact on the next phase of his career.

A fully fleshed out, unified blend of words and music, perhaps for the first time Bowie's songs start stretching out in order to accommodate the scale of his ambition. On several tracks the innovative use of synths, strings and more ambitious structures create something appropriately monolithic. He has a new voice, too, the trademark feline yelp and faux-Yank drawl now mixing with a Scott Walker-like cavernous croon, the first fully verified sighting of GothBowie.

It's used to spellbinding effect on the nine-minute "Sweet Thing"/"Candidate"/"Sweet Thing (Reprise)" sequence, one of Bowie's major achievements, and his most ambitious piece of writing up to this point. Sexually daring, darkly romantic, deeply despondent, it moves from show-stopping ballad to churning, Velvets-esque repetition, before expiring in an ecstatic, jazzy climax. Never the greatest saxophonist, Bowie's thin horn playing here adds an appropriately ghostly timbre, while the words – *"We'll buy some drugs and watch a band/And jump in the river holding hands"* – capture the album's overarching love affair with wasted, despairing romance.

Elsewhere, on the bad-vibes death disco of "1984", like "Shaft" with the night terrors, and the swooning, though rather rote, gospel-soul of "Rock'n'Roll With Me", *Diamond Dogs* predicts the coming sound of *Young Americans*. Throughout, the elliptical, fragmented lyrics, partly a result of Bowie's interest in William Burroughs' "cut-up" technique, are crammed with drug references and unforgettable imagery. On "We Are The Dead", which unfolds into one of Bowie's most brilliantly labyrinthine songs, the picture he paints is truly, terribly ominous: *"It's the theatre of financiers – count them, 15 round the table, white and dressed to kill"*.

"Big Brother" is yet another majestic, soulful anthem of doom, its strange country interlude hinting at the album's occasional concession to black humour. As it lurches into the closing "Chant Of The Ever Circling Skeletal Family", a brutally concentric mantra promising nothing more than approaching annihilation, it's hard not to marvel, and feel a little fearful, at the leaps Bowie has made in such a short period of time.

RELEASE DATE 07 | MARCH | 1975

YOUNG AMERICANS

High times in Philadelphia and New York, as Bowie turns his back on English "dirge" and embraces plastic soul.

By Bud Scoppa

THE STRUTTING, UPTOWN grooves and swinging licks of *Young Americans* have so deeply embedded themselves into the pop consciousness that it's easy to forget what a radical change it was for David Bowie. The glam god appropriates American R'n'B and pulls it off? Who would've believed it, or known Bowie even had it in him to begin with? To put it another way, imagine Bowie acolyte Lady Gaga suddenly putting on a flannel shirt and jeans and doing a Lucinda Williams-inspired alt. country album.

Young Americans was made during yet another transitional time for Bowie. He was in the process of dumping manager Tony DeFries, his relationship with Angie was deteriorating and he was haemorrhaging money, which perhaps partially explained how gaunt he'd become.

More to the point, he was getting deeper into cocaine – but then he had plenty of company on that score. During the mid-'70s, it seemed like practically everyone involved in the music business, from superstars to secretaries, were snorting blow like there was no tomorrow. Concurrently, party people in increasing numbers were forming regimented lines under spinning mirror balls, typically under the influence of coke and quaaludes. *Young Americans*, then, was very much of its time.

Lured by the scores of Philly soul hits cut there by Gamble & Huff and Thom Bell during the early '70s, Bowie entered Sigma Sound in the heat of August 1974. Awaiting him was a multi-racial American studio band consisting of A-list session men Andy Newmark (drums), Willie Weeks (bass) and David Sanborn (alto sax), as well as Puerto Rico-born guitarist Carlos Alomar, who'd played a major part in introducing Bowie to contemporary R'n'B and New York's bustling black and Latin music scenes. Also on hand was a trio of black vocalists: then-little-known Luther Vandross, Ava Cherry (Bowie's lover during this period) and Robin Clark, Alomar's wife. The only holdover was pianist Mike Garson, who'd been recording with Bowie since *Aladdin Sane*.

The sessions had barely begun when Bowie decided the sounds that staff engineer Carl Parullo was getting weren't satisfactory, so he called Tony Visconti, with whom he'd renewed his working relationship during the mixdown of *Diamond Dogs*. Not until the jetlagged producer arrived at Sigma Sound the following afternoon did he discover that he'd be called upon not simply to co-produce but also to engineer – a job with which he had only a passing acquaintance at the time. By the time Bowie showed up at the studio, Visconti had figured out how to work the non-standard console. They got right down to work, and the atmosphere was "electrifying" that night, acccrding to the producer. "It was only about four hours into the first session," Alomar recalled in 2004. "We got to the guitar breakdown and we knew we'd got something." By the next morning, they'd nailed down a keeper take of a song Bowie had originally titled "The Young American" for an album that then bore the working title *The Gouster* (a now-forgotten slang term in black culture, referring to a street style adopted by high school students and gang members).

From that pivotal session, the project took on considerable momentum, and within two weeks they had hammered out an album's worth of tracks, despite the fact that "Nothing was organised, and it turned out to be one enormous jam session", as Visconti recalled in Stuart Grundy and John Tobler's 1982 book, *The Record Producers*. After some overdubbing in New York, the album was completed to Bowie's satisfaction, and after

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"*Young Americans* isn't exactly a bundle of fun...but as a transitional work away from youthful fascination towards mature consideration, it's both revealing and impressively uncompromising."
IAN MACDONALD, NME, MARCH 15, 1975

"Not only are his hollow, frozen vocals weirdly out of context, but he patently lacks any deep emotional connection to his material."
MICHAEL WATTS, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 15, 1975

TRACKMARKS | Young Americans

1. **Young Americans** ★★★★★
2. **Win** ★★★★★
3. **Fascination** ★★★★★
4. **Right** ★★★★★
5. **Somebody Up There Likes Me** ★★★
6. **Across The Universe** ★★
7. **Can You Hear Me** ★★★★★
8. **Fame** ★★★★★

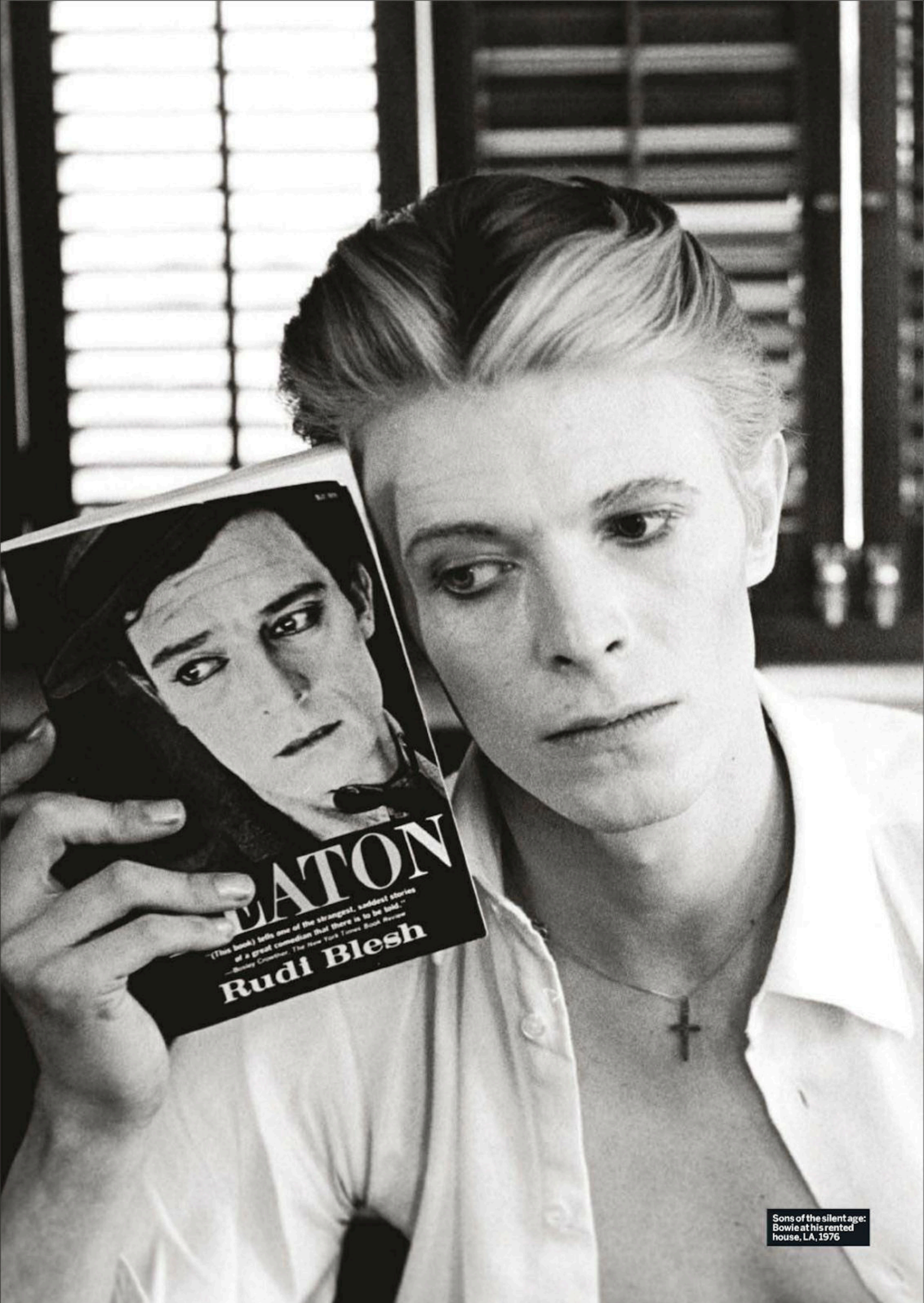
RELEASED: March 7, 1975
LABEL: RCA
PRODUCED BY: Tony Visconti, Harry Maslin and David Bowie
RECORDED AT: Sigma Sound, Philadelphia; Electric Lady Studios, New York City)
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (composer, vocals, guitar, keyboards); Andy Newmark (drums); Willie Weeks (bass); Carlos Alomar (guitar); David Sanborn (sax); Mike Garson (piano); Luther Vandross, Robin Clark and Ava Cherry (backing vocals, Philly); Rablo Rosario (percussion); Ralph McDonald (percussion); Larry Washington (congas); Dennis Davis (drums); Emir Kassan (bass); Earl Slick (guitar); John Lennon (guitar and vocals on "Fame" and "Across The Universe"); Jean Fineberg, Anthony Hinton, Jean Millington, Warren Peace and Diane Sumler (bk vocals).
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US 9

collapsing on his hotel bed and sleeping for two days straight, Visconti returned to London. That would have been that, had not Bowie run into John Lennon, inspiring him to grab the expat ex-Beatle and head down to Electric Lady Studios. Those impromptu sessions yielded "Fame", which they worked out on the fly, with Alomar playing a key role in shaping its churning, force-of-nature groove. The principals also cut what would be *Young Americans*' only misstep, an over-the-top cover of Lennon's "Across The Universe".

In one interview after another following the album's release, Bowie described the style of the album as "plastic soul", the adjective oddly dismissive considering the degree of contemporaneous authenticity he and his fellow musicians had attained. Of the album's eight tracks, "Young Americans", "Fascination" and "Fame" are uptempo blue-eyed soul classics on which the studio band rides each groove for all its worth. If the title song vividly captured the zeitgeist of post-Watergate America, the strutting "Fascination" was inspired by what Bowie saw as a sharp contrast in vitality between the records being made in the US and the UK. "Over here, it's bright young Americans, you know, the lilting phrase before the crashing crescendo," he told *NME* in 1975. "In England, it's a dirge." "Win", "Right" and "Can You Hear Me" are sultry soul ballads that reveal for the first time Bowie's startlingly natural ability to lose himself in the moment, most captivatingly in the extended outro of "Right". The fourth ballad, "Somebody Up There Likes Me", fails to cohere, but unlike the Beatles cover, it doesn't interrupt the intoxicating flow.

In retrospect, it's remarkable that Bowie went straight from *Diamond Dogs* to making one of the first disco records, as well as one of the definitive albums of a subgenre we'll call blue-eyed discothèque soul (along with Boz Scaggs' *Silk Degrees*). *Young Americans* would yield a pair of hits in the title track and "Fame", which became Bowie's first No 1 single in the US.

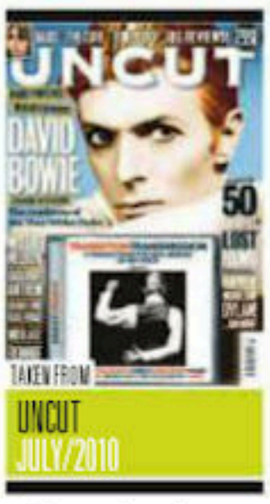
Given all he accomplished with this hip, virtuoso, deeply funky landmark, it's just as remarkable that the album was merely a side trip for this restless artist, though it did provide him with a core group of musicians who'd continue to provide sparks for his music for several years to come. And just as significantly, the nocturnal, coke-fuelled methodology Bowie employed throughout the sessions – in those days, musicians and producers euphemistically referred to the practice as "maintenance" – would soon become central not just to his process, but to his very aesthetic.



Sons of the silent age: Bowie at his rented house, LA, 1976

"I WAS DRIVING MYSELF TO THE POINT OF INSANITY"

A diet of milk and cocaine, a reclusive life in LA, a burgeoning interest in the occult... JOHN ROBINSON pieces together the troubled reign of the Thin White Duke, and the masterpiece that came out of the madness – *Station To Station*.



SITUATED ON A HILL overlooking the small Jamaican coastal town of Ocho Rios, Point Of View is not the kind of place that encourages unexpected visitors. Since 1972, the house has been owned by Keith Richards. Today, The Riff is not at home – but he has lent David Bowie the key.

Despite the surroundings, at this point in early January 1976, Bowie is not able to relax fully. In three weeks time, he will begin an ambitious world tour to support his new album, *Station To Station*: 39 dates in North America, followed by 30 in Europe. Duly, he has transported a band to this remote, if idyllic, location to begin a period of intensive rehearsal. The tour will be called "Isolar" – an astronomical name to suit a remote star.

"Bowie's concept was extremely simple," says Carlos Alomar, who played guitar on the album and the tour. "Take the musicians away from the phone, away from their loved ones, away from any kind of distractions, and put them on an island where all they can do is eat, sleep and play music. That's classic rock'n'roll."

For the past few months, Bowie has praised the music of Kraftwerk, particularly how they use noise to "increase productivity". With his new tour, he is intending much the same: Isolar is to offer a stripped-down band, playing on a bare stage, with a simple "white light" scheme. If the effect is to be visually striking, it is also economically so. "It's going to make an obscenely large amount of money," Bowie tells one reporter, "Which I need to set up my production company."

"David was at a stage in his career where he needed to take control of things," says Carlos Alomar. "He was aligning himself with actresses and actors, giving interviews to magazines that were not solely about music. He was able to branch off in totally different ways. He took care of business."

Having parted company with longtime manager Tony DeFries, and quickly dispensed with the services of another, Michael Lippman, at the start of 1976 Bowie was eager to take charge of his own finances. The past few months had shown him the possibilities that lay before him in music and outside of it:

> **"DAVID WAS AT THE STAGE IN HIS CAREER WHEN HE NEEDED TO TAKE CONTROL OF THINGS..."**
> **CARLOS ALOMAR**

acting, directing, photography, art. Now, he needed to take responsibility for making sure that they materialised.

"The organisation was all business," says Stacy Heydon, who played lead guitar on the tour. "When I was offered the job I was told that if there was one fuck-up, I was gone. They came in my room with a tape and a cassette player, and they wanted me to learn the show for the next day's rehearsal. And I did."

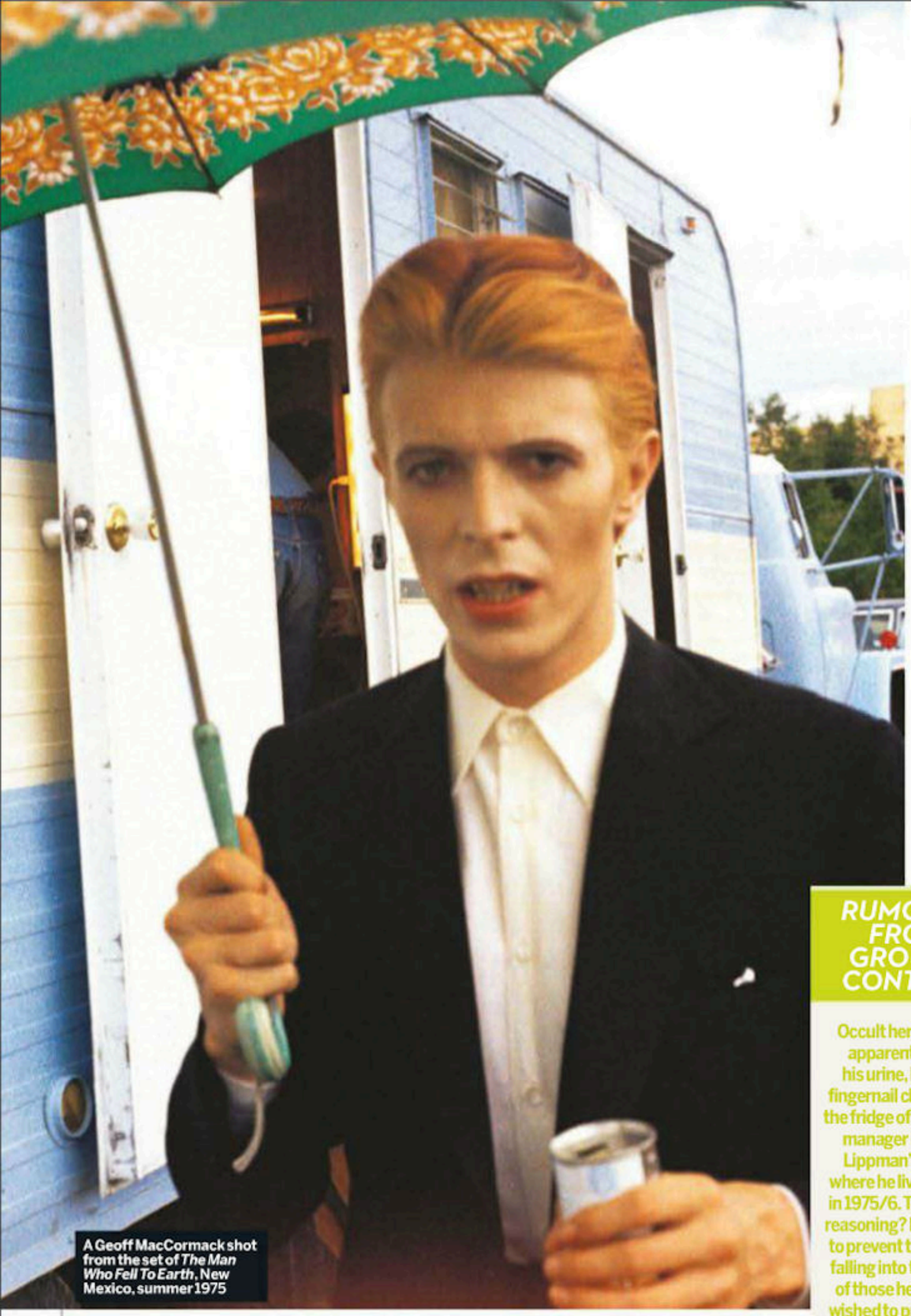
"A great band, artistically fabulous," recalls Iggy Pop, who joined the tour as Bowie's spiritual companion. "Great performances, I learned a lot. And then from the back side I learned a lot about how big rock works, too."

Over its near-70 dates, Isolar would mark Bowie's journey from decadence, to productivity; from lurid colour to utilitarian monochrome. Geographically, it was a journey from the continental United States, and on into Europe. Artistically, it was the most significant he ever made.

IT'S HARD TO imagine *Station To Station* as an album that could solve problems for David Bowie. This is a work of uncomfortable contradictions: it contains both American crooning and European drone, songs of devotion and occult practice, of devoted love, and cold betrayal. It throws down its gauntlet with white noise, and doesn't get noticeably less complex from there. "It captures the spiritual malaise of the decade," Allan Jones wrote in *Melody Maker* in 1976, a view it's still difficult to contradict. It was an album born of arcane practice and eclectic listening, created quickly, from different traditions, out of the comfort zone of either.

"The scenario was foreign to him, and to me," says Carlos Alomar, who had played on *Young Americans*, and now joined Bowie for his next work. "I was talking to him about James Brown. He talked to me about Thelonious Monk. I was talking to him about Nina Simone. He was talking to CONTINUES OVER»

CORBIS



A Geoff MacCormack shot from the set of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, New Mexico, summer 1975

me about Kraftwerk. The fact that he had more European tendencies was offset by my American tendencies. We educated ourselves about our own backgrounds."

"I think how Kraftwerk influenced me was attitudinal," Bowie told me in 2000. "It was the stance they took. It's almost like: 'There's a new universe one can exist in. What would I find if I went to that universe?'"

The universe of *Station To Station* was teeming with ideas, pulling in several different directions at once. It was made by someone whose mind was working at top speed, a mercurial figure who couldn't stay in one place for long – a characteristic Bowie brought to every aspect of the production.

"We'd start to shoot, then he'd disappear," says Steve Schapiro, who took the album's cover photo. "He would come out with another incredible outfit. Then, just as I was about to shoot it, he'd say, 'No, no wait a minute,' he'd go in the dressing room and come out in something totally different."

What Schapiro was helping to capture on film was the birth of a new Bowie persona. Unlike Ziggy Stardust, his latest creation had a genealogy that was surprisingly terrestrial: the look of Buster Keaton, the manners of an English lord, the staggering drug consumption of a beat writer. On the surface, he seemed perfectly respectable. But on the inside, he was a frightening psychological specimen. This was The Thin White Duke.

"I heard *Station To Station* and I thought it was mindblowing," says Glenn Hughes, the former Deep Purple singer/bassist, and a friend of Bowie's. "But I was amazed how he could come up with that, having been in complete cocaine psychosis."

Because if the Thin White Duke had a weakness, it was cocaine. It was true, cocaine had helped create *Station To Station*. But at times over the past two years it had been hard to tell who was driving the train. Was it Bowie, or cocaine – or even the Duke himself?

LOS ANGELES, IN the spring of 1975, and David Bowie is leading two lives. One is conducted in private, in borrowed houses in the Hollywood hills. One, however, is conducted in public, in the pages of magazines, to whose reporters, in support of *Young Americans*, Bowie dispenses a tide of controversial soundbites, terrific schemes and deadly charm.

"I've rocked my roll," he tells *Rolling Stone*, in April. "I've written nine films," he informs *Hi!* magazine in June, eagerly displaying his illustrated story-boards and collages. By July, he has consolidated his position. "I've done with rock'n'roll," he tells *The Sunday Times*. "Now I'm a film director."

Whatever he was doing, however, he was diversifying his portfolio of talents, Bowie was doing it very fast indeed. In April, Cameron Crowe observed while Bowie produced an Iggy Pop session, and then hastily improvised a song of his own. He later told Crowe, "I could give you three unreleased David Bowie albums right now." Music, it seemed, was too small a place in which to confine him and his productivity.

"Conquering America would mean conquering music, fashion, business. He wanted the impact of The Beatles," says Carlos Alomar. "When Lennon came to the studio [*to record "Fame" for Young Americans*], he was so excited. He wanted the same thing; more."

Bowie's relationship with Iggy Pop seemed to be a mirror of the Bowie/Lennon friendship, with Pop becoming to Bowie both a sparring partner and a research tool for his US mission. "John Lennon was very helpful to people dirtier and poorer than him at certain key times," says Iggy today. "Bowie liked what I was doing, and had an interesting dialogue with a sort of a representative composite American of the kind he could relate to. A little bit sullen teen, a little bit Neal Cassady, a little bit Jack Kerouac."

Certainly, Bowie could speak extremely successfully to the composite American – "Fame" became his first US No 1 in late July 1975 – and he had a wide experience of their country, from the clubs of Harlem, to Philadelphia's Sigma Sound Studios.

But if he wanted to operate at the next level, and be at the nexus of the record *and* movie business, he needed to devote his attentions to one city in particular: Los Angeles.

"LA was a hang," says Earl Slick, who played lead guitar on *Station*... "People wanted to make records there, hang out there, so if you went to the Rainbow on Sunset Strip, you'd see people from every band in the world there on any given night. And because it was Hollywood, there were a lot of people from the movie and TV business. They were intrigued by us – and we were intrigued by them.

"It was very innocent," Slick continues. "The times being what they were, the scene was that you could do whatever you wanted to do, and there never seemed to be consequences."

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Occult hero! Bowie apparently kept his urine, hair and fingernail clippings in the fridge of sometime manager Michael Lippman's home, where he lived briefly in 1975/6. The Duke's reasoning? He wanted to prevent them from falling into the hands of those he thought wished to put magick spells on him...

At Cherokee Studios, LA, with Bobby Womack and Ronnie Wood

"There was a lot of coke," remembers Geoff "Warren Peace" MacCormack, a close friend of Bowie's, and his backing singer on *Station*... "Everyone was wandering around with chains round their necks with little coke spoons."

"It was OK to do a line with the president of a major record label back then," says Glenn Hughes. "That was the norm, nobody had a handle on the addictiveness of cocaine. Like, are we really enjoying ourselves now? Is this the way it's supposed to be?"

WITH ECONOMIES FORCED on him by his severance with his former management company, MainMan, Bowie, with Geoff MacCormack in tow, began a period of what was effectively upscale couch-surfing. Later he crashed with Michael Lippman, the entertainment lawyer who fleetingly became his manager ("It's great having DB to stay," Lippman told *The Sunday Times*, "he's got more energy than anyone I've ever known."), and got a place of his own on Doheny Drive. In the spring of 1975, however, he moved into Glenn Hughes' Beverly Hills home. While a couple of years previously Ringo Starr, Keith Moon and Ronnie Wood had caroused in LA's most public areas, Bowie and Hughes were far less social animals.

"We never really went anywhere," says Hughes. "He was very, very manic. I tried to keep up with him, but he'd go off on tangents: I'd never really seen paranoia taking cocaine until he and I got together. He'd sort of relish it in a way. It was almost part of his make-up in that period."

"I didn't really use drugs for hedonistic purposes," Bowie told me in 2000. "I didn't go out very much. I wasn't getting totally out of it and going to clubs and all that; I'd never really done that to a major extent. I was really just working. I'd work days in a row without sleep. It wasn't a joyful, euphoric kind of thing. I was driving myself to a point of insanity."

"I want you to visualise this," says Hughes. "It was stark. When people are in their disease, with cocaine, and it's high-grade cocaine, it's really not a party. It's a couple of people in a room. David didn't want people around when he was doing his thing. When I first met him, at the Beverly Wilshire hotel, there were 30 people in the room – but he became isolated."

While Bowie was doing nothing for his personal wellbeing or mental health, he was still, after a fashion, nourishing himself. What he ingested – a diet of occult reading, Nazi history, and German expressionist cinema – may not have been good for Bowie himself. But it was a hearty sustenance for the ravenous, increasingly deranged Duke.

"By the time he was hanging out with Glenn in LA, in the hills, things were quite negative," says Ava Cherry, Bowie's then-girlfriend and backing singer. "He was staying up for two or three days. After he'd been up for so long, he'd be tired and irritable, and intolerant of stupidity. I remember him putting on Fritz Lang movies, and was like, 'Can't you stop fidgeting? You could learn something here!'"

"He would read anything," remembers Glenn Hughes. "From numerology, to fascism. He would do this painting. He would paint a lot on the windows of my house. At first it bothered me. But it just became part and parcel of what we were into. I was concerned for him: his main consumption was milk and cocaine."

As Bowie's companion for much of this period, Ava Cherry recalls a couple of pointed incidents when the meeting of cocaine and the dark arts led to uncomfortable moments. On one occasion, she and Bowie attended a party at *Lucifer Rising* director Kenneth Anger's house, and an uncomfortable vibe led to the pair leaving after 20 minutes. On another, she recalls how Ron Wood's attempt to get Bowie to leave his seclusion and socialise with other people backfired, and led to a dispute with Jimmy Page over a spilled glass of wine.

"People were saying that Jimmy was Aleister Crowley's apprentice or something," recalls Cherry. "David intimated to me that he wasn't afraid of Jimmy Page, and started reading all these books about the occult, and would sit there for three days at a time reading. Obviously, the candy had a lot to do with it."

"He was spooked," says Glenn Hughes. "When David found out I was living within minutes of the site of the Manson murders, he hid all the knives in my house. I had guns that had been moved. I felt for him. That whole period in LA was very dark."

"THE LA SCENE? IT SEEMED YOU COULD DO WHATEVER YOU WANTED, WITH NO CONSEQUENCES" EARL SLICK

AS PARANOID AND AS troubling as it was, however, Bowie's life in America was not without continuity. In 1974, an English film crew had suggested a documentary film that would follow Bowie's American successes, but the subject had quickly tired of the project – leaving director Alan Yentob to assemble a film from live footage and some extended scenes of Bowie traveling by car. As unpromising as it sounded, *Cracked Actor* drew a wonderful portrait of a paranoid and dislocated star, and was key to determining his next move. In one scene, Bowie was filmed being driven through the Californian desert, where he sighted a wax museum. "A wax museum in the desert," Bowie pondered. "You'd think it would melt."

As a metaphor for Bowie's next project of 1975, playing the lead in Nic Roeg's film, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, it's hard to beat. Impressed by Bowie's otherness, director Nic Roeg arranged a meeting with the star via a friend of Ava Cherry's – the late glamour model/actress Claudia

CONTINUES OVER»

GEOFF MACCORMACK/GENESIS PUBLICATIONS

Jennings. Nic Roeg's passion impressed Bowie, as did the opportunity of developing his own career.

Filming began in New Mexico in July, and lasted for three months, yielding an unfailingly beautiful, extremely strange film. The general moviegoer witnessed a Bowie performance that was eerie and occasionally moving. The Bowie fan saw all the otherness that they had responded to in the star's music made explicit on the screen.

"I was very impressed," says Ava Cherry. "I didn't know he could act. He was the alien, as he was in real life. I remember him saying to me, 'See how we can influence the masses?' And that was true. When he did that movie, his fans were like 'Maybe he really is an alien…' I felt sympathy for that spaceman. It was like a very strange parody of David."

The Man Who Fell To Earth kickstarted a period of intense productivity for Bowie. Years later, he would confess that the "work" he did in much of 1975 was to obsess endlessly over minor and irrelevant details. Now, however, his powerful creativity flowered in earnest. In October 1975, Bowie finished filming in New Mexico. Less than eight weeks later, his new single, "Golden Years", had entered the American Top 10.

BY OCTOBER 1975, Earl Slick, the alter-ego of an easygoing New York guitarist named Frank Madeloni, had become accustomed to the on-off working relationship he enjoyed with David Bowie. His audition to become part of Bowie's Diamond Dogs tour band had been to play along to some tracks in the studio, and then have a drink with the star. After playing on *Young Americans*, he hadn't heard much from his employer, so had resumed his solo career. He then received a call to present himself at Cherokee Studios, LA, to begin work on a new David Bowie album, work which couldn't help but reflect its author's life and habits.

"Everything else around you pretty much disappeared," says Slick, today. "Your personal life, everything. David's good at creating that. You're in there [*the studio*], and that's what you're doing, period. We went into the void."

As is maybe inevitable, given some of the circumstances, some of the participants are vague on the specifics of how *Station To Station* was made. Both Carlos Alomar and Earl Slick, the record's two guitarists, are happy to claim credit for the riff to "Golden Years", a subtle corruption of the 1967 composition "Funky Broadway" by Dyke & The Blazers, a hit for Wilson Pickett. Producer Harry Maslin doesn't feel happy violating the confidences he has with his clients to discuss the album. One person thinks the tracks were largely improvised on the spot; another that the songs were in place, and all that remained to be determined was the arrangements. E Street band keyboard player Roy Bittan was there either at the behest of Bowie's caretaker manager Pat Gibbons, or because Earl Slick had once played in a band with him in New York. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the sessions were closed; photos show that the studio welcomed guests like Ronnie Wood and Bobby Womack. According to Cherokee Studios owner Bruce Robb, Sinatra dropped by in a break from recording *Trilogy* at the same facility to listen to playbacks.

"WHEN IT CAME TO PLAYING LIVE, IT WAS LIKE GOING TO THE ALTAR. DAVID TOOK CARE OF HIS AUDIENCE..." STACY HEYDON

What is certain is that for two months, Bowie, Alomar, Slick, and Bittan, along with drummer Dennis Davis, and bassist George Murray entered Cherokee Studios, and attempted to redraw Bowie's map. Time was not a consideration. Money not an object. Technology an asset, not an obstacle.

"Bowie threw us into the deep end," says Carlos Alomar, "telling us that we could do whatever we wanted. 'Make the sound of a train? We've got all the time you need…'

"He knew he liked the direction of Kraftwerk," Alomar continues. "Him having the tolerance to allow us to do that… allowing me to do an introduction to a song that's four minutes long. It wasn't because I wanted to do it. Kraftwerk had shown him it was possible. It was Bowie whose tolerance to all music and technology allowed us to do this."

"It's not like, 'When are we going to get this done?' or 'What's the single going to be?'," recalls Earl Slick. "We weren't too minded about what was happening at the record company. The most time I've spent in the studio with David was on *Station*. He'd have a basic song done, but all the riffs, the nuances were put together in the studio. He'd have lyrics and melodies, but then Carlos would put his stamp on it, I would put my stamp on it."

The order of business at Cherokee was informal, but productive: songs worked on extensively, and only then a take attempted. The job of Harry Maslin (Slick: "The sane person") was to keep alert and on his game 24 hours a day, to maximise the potential of what was created. On the title track, there was a strange meeting of freeform experimentation – and ultimately, a rigid discipline.

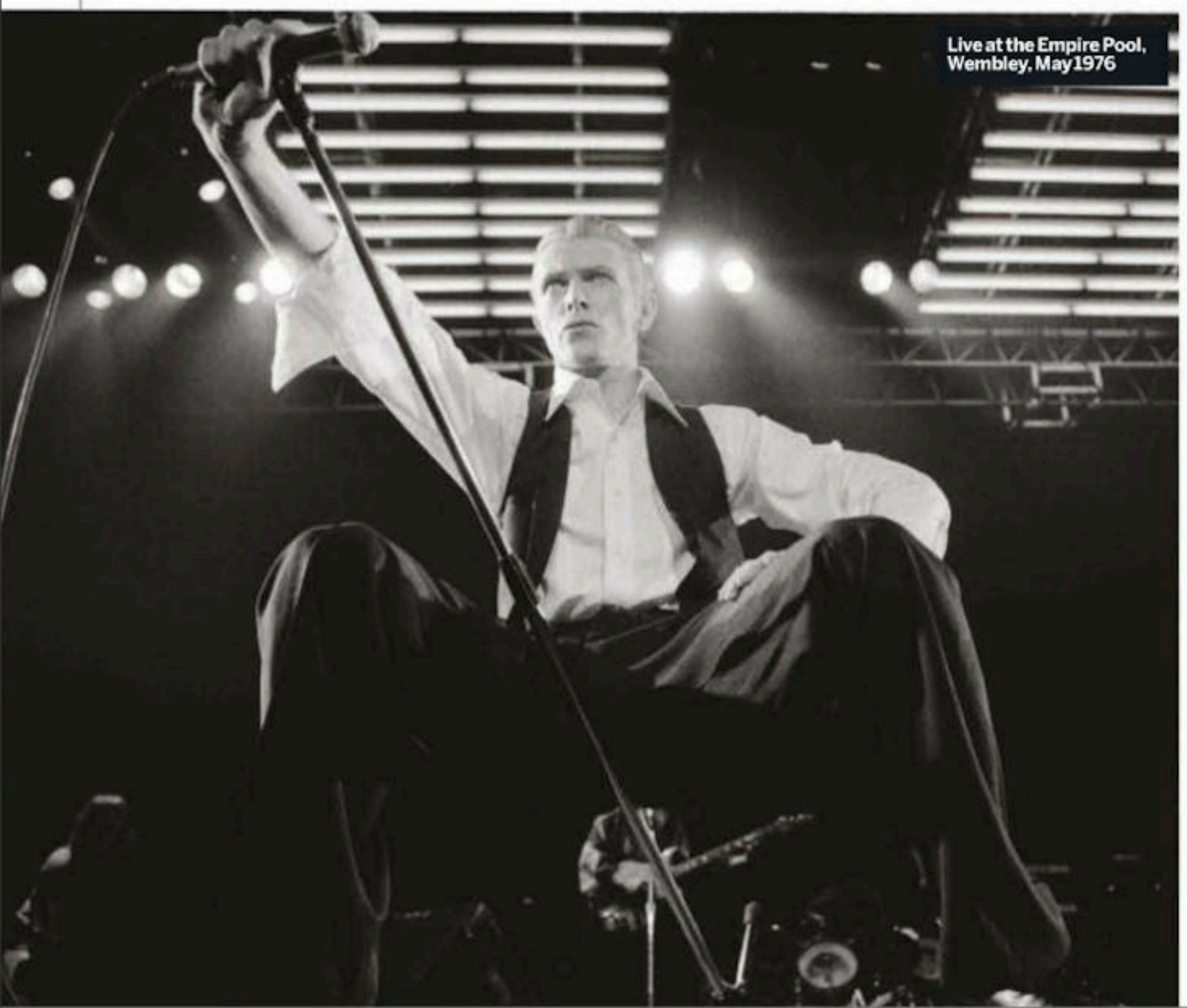
"We had a couple of Marshall stacks and we were just feeding back," says Earl Slick. "That was something you'd never be able to do with anybody else – so it was cool. We got that arrangement together, and we played that thing straight through."

Exactly how the alchemy was arrived at, however, is something a little harder to ascertain. Bowie, it appears, was a composite of encouraging, directing hand and vaporous, inspirational presence. But as for revealing his thoughts, discussing what had led him to this work, this, the singer never confided.

"Bowie worked in his own void when it came to creative things," says Carlos Alomar. "I didn't get involved in his lyrics, the direction, the concept. My role was to offer him a palette, so he could create a third element."

"I have a distinctive memory of what it was like being there," says Earl Slick. "But the details are gone. If you think back about things in your life that matter to you…you might not be able to recall all the details, but you get a feeling from it. That's what I get from *Station To Station*."

"Bowie operated on a 'need to know' basis," says Carlos Alomar. "The policy he introduced



Live at the Empire Pool, Wembley, May 1976

RETNA

"Are we going to say that David wasn't aware of controversy?" The Victoria Station "salute", May 1976. Above left: on the Dinah Shore show

was 'I am here, but unavailable for comment'. He's there – but he only makes available what he wishes us to know."

At the end of the sessions, Bowie did express himself unequivocally to Glenn Hughes.

"He told me he felt his demon had caught up with him," says Hughes. "He told me he had to sort himself out. He had to get out of Los Angeles."

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL...

Bowie cut three Bruce Springsteen tracks in 1975 – "It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City" (at Sigma Studios), "Growin' Up" (Chateux d'Herouville) and "Spirit In The Night" (with Ava Cherry). The first two surfaced in '89, but the latter was kept in the vaults until Cherry's *People From Bad Homes* was finally issued in 1995.

FOR STACY HEYDON, it was an odder than average January night. He went to bed in his Toronto apartment a studio musician, who made his living writing jingles for local restaurants and shoe stores. He woke up to a phone call early the next morning that asked him to come and audition to be David Bowie's lead guitarist. He thought it was a prank call. "But they said, 'If you don't believe me, call Air Canada. Your tickets are at the desk. We need you down here for a rehearsal tomorrow at 2pm.'" remembers Heydon. "I'm like, 'Where?' And they said, 'Jamaica'".

Heydon got on the plane, and was met on his arrival by a limo that took him to a gated residence on the top of a hill. As he walked in to what he discovered later was Keith Richards' front door, and into Richards' front room, he confronted a band preparing for action. On guitar, bass and drums were Alomar, George Murray and Dennis Davis. On keys was former Yes member Tony Kaye, himself only arrived the previous day.

"And there's this rake of a man, about 120lbs, with three different colours in his hair," says Heydon, then a keen ice-hockey player. "It was a quite a culture shock for me. Men were painting their fingernails.

"He just said, 'You must be Stacy. I'm David.'"

What was taking place at Ochos Rios was the beginning of a dramatic detoxification process. In the eight weeks since recording sessions for *Station To Station* had finished, there had been ample reason to suspect this was necessary. On the *Soul Train* show, in early November, Bowie had answered questions from the studio audience, but when asked about *The Man Who Fell To Earth* had seemed very odd indeed. Which character was he playing? "All three!" he replied. During an agonising interview with Russell Harty for BBC TV, he had appeared distracted. On *Dinah!*, he had taken karate lessons beside Henry Winkler.

Not everyone was affected positively by the change in attitude around Bowie. Earl Slick, a stalwart of Bowie's bands and recordings of the past two years, was a casualty of the star's evolving managerial regime. "There were things going on which weren't coming from David," says Slick today. "They caused me a lot of stress. I had a record contract, so said, 'I don't need David Bowie', and I opted out. Not the smartest thing I've ever done."

Meanwhile, in Ocho Rios, the newly christened "Raw Moon" band continued to prepare for the tour. Though time was short, and the start of the tour just two weeks away, the mood gradually became more relaxed. The band even took a trip to Kingston, recording a version of the Pop/Alomar/Bowie composition "Sister Midnight" in a studio there.

"In the morning we'd be at the beach, swimming," recalls Alomar. "We gave the caretaker money to buy us food. We wanted to eat what they ate – goat, lychee, fish. That was the environment. After dinner there was nothing better than to play music all night."

THE THIN WHITE Duke would meet his first paying customers in Vancouver, on February 2, 1976. Before his arrival, the crowd would be entertained by Kraftwerk's *Radioactivity* hissing through the PA. The arena crowd would then be invited to watch 20 minutes of a surrealist film, Buñuel and Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou*.

All that movie's eyeball slicing, however, couldn't compare to what happened next. Stacy Heydon would bend before his twin Marshall amps, coaxing from them a hail of feedback, while Tony Kaye began the metronomic pounding of "Station To Station". And finally, into a white light, with hair slicked back and packet of Gitanes protruding from his waistcoat, a new Bowie would emerge.

Well, not entirely new. If the Duke could be cajoled into behaving on occasion, there were still reminders he couldn't be tamed completely. On arriving in England by train in early May for six shows at Wembley Empire Pool, an *NME* camera caught Bowie mid-wave, apparently offering a Nazi salute to a crowd at Victoria station. Though ultimately penitent on this point, as late as that September, he was still talking about Fascism in interviews.

"Are we going to say David wasn't aware of controversy?" says Carlos Alomar. "Our publicist would show us the articles. And we'd say 'Look at this one!' And then it would be on to the next town."

Likewise, when the band got on the road, there was the chance for a relative outsider to see exactly what Bowie's lifestyle was still like.

"The first time I'd seen cocaine was the first date on that tour," says Stacy Heydon. "I could tell David had some challenges with drugs. But when it came to playing, it was like going to the altar. None of us ever caught the fans short. David took care of his audience."

With three days left until the start of the tour, the Raw Moon band flew to their homes, then on to Vancouver for a final dress rehearsal. Bowie, meanwhile, boarded a boat, and set sail for Canada, to begin what would become the most influential phase of his career.

"I was in a fragile state at that time," Bowie told me in 2000. "It was time to get out of this terrible lifestyle I'd put myself into, and get healthy. It was time to pull myself together."

From Station To Station: Travels With Bowie 1973-1976 is a handbound limited edition of 2,000 copies. Every copy is signed by Geoff MacCormack and David Bowie. Available from www.genesis-publications.com: Tel +44 (0) 1483 540970

GETTY IMAGES, PA PHOTOS, RETNA

RELEASE DATE 23 | JANUARY | 1976

STATION TO STATION

Run for the shadows... Paranoid and snowblind, the Thin White Duke concocts a potent hybrid of sinewy funk and robotic beats.

By Neil Spencer

BY AUTUMN 1975 it was clear that David Bowie had conquered America: the question was whether doing so had destroyed him. To the US public he was *Diamond Dogs* glam rocker, "Fame" chart-topper, dapper dancer on *Soul Train*, MOR entertainer on *The Cher Show*, and fledgling movie star with *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, all the while the arch, handsome Englishman. The private Bowie was an altogether different character; an inscrutable recluse, half crazy from cocaine addiction, an emaciated occult explorer cowering in his rented Beverley Hills house in terror that he was under psychic attack from Hollywood warlocks.

Despite his wretched state, and a summer of New Mexico heat shooting *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, for which he was trying to write a soundtrack, Bowie somehow delivered one of his greatest albums. Snowblind as he was, his artistic instincts remained true. *Station To Station*'s mix of sinewy funk and robotic beats, romantic balladry and cold alienation, had a grandeur echoed in Bowie's new persona, The Thin White Duke, a haughty and unsmiling aristocrat. The album consolidated Bowie's international status and provided a template for eager listeners like the still-unformed Joy Division, Magazine, Human League and Talking Heads.

Bowie apparently remembers little about making *Station To Station*, but guitarist Carlos Alomar, its dominant musical presence, recalls the long nocturnal sessions at LA's Cherokee Studios as "the height of our experimental time... It was one of the most glorious albums I've ever done."

Recording was an elliptical, improvisational process – producer Harry Maslin remembers Bowie arriving with the pronouncement, "I've got this great new song that I haven't written yet". "Golden Years", the most fully formed number he had, was recorded first. Its disco surge was a carry-over from *Young Americans*, and it made a winning lead-in single for the late autumn of 1975. The unlikely legend goes that the song was first offered to Elvis Presley. More certain is that Bowie was now borrowing the King's booming vocal style, lowering his formerly reedy voice into that of a baritone balladeer.

The single's catchiness owed much to Alomar's immaculate guitar coda. "You've got to have a classic guitar line at the beginning of a song," said Alomar later. "I made sure each song had a signature guitar part." True to his word, Alomar provided "Stay" with a steely riff evolved from the jittery super-funk of James Brown, overlaid by a howling solo from Earl Slick in the role of Mick Ronson. Where "Golden Years" oozes confidence – "*Stick with me baby for a thousand years*" – in "Stay", Bowie is unsettled by a "*heart wrecker*" and the sticky sexual knowledge that "*you can never really tell when somebody wants what you want too*".

Station To Station's overall chilly mood is defined by its opening, 10 minute-plus title track. The swirling sound of a steam locomotive gives way to grinding industrial chords as Slick's sustained guitar wails in the distance. The atmosphere is ominous; whatever is approaching is clearly more than just a train. When Bowie's vocal arrives, three minutes in, it's to announce the disquieting image of "*the thin white duke, throwing darts in lovers' eyes*", before he weighs in with operatic vigour to declare, "*Here we are, one magical movement from Kether to Malkuth*".

The centre of the album is right here. The "*magical moment, the stuff from where dreams are woven*" (an image lifted from Shakespeare's *Tempest*) is human life itself, as is the transition from Kether, the celestial crown on the kabbalistic tree of life, to Malkuth, the most

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Not only the most important recorded statement Bowie has ever made, but also one of the most significant albums released in the last five years."

ALLAN JONES, MELODY MAKER, JANUARY 24, 1976

"On a purely audio basis... *Station To Station* represents a solid triumph for Bowie as an organiser of music. Maybe if I had the sleeve I'd know whether it was a concept album (heh!) or not. Hope it isn't, though."

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY, NME, JANUARY 10, 1976

TRACKMARKS | Station To Station

1. **Station To Station** ★★★★★
2. **Golden Years** ★★★★
3. **Word On A Wing** ★★★
4. **TVC 15** ★★★★
5. **Stay** ★★★★★
6. **Wild Is The Wind** ★★★★

RELEASED: January 23, 1976
LABEL: RCA
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Harry Maslin
RECORDED AT: Cherokee Studios, LA
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, tenor and alto sax, Moog synth, Mellotron); Carlos Alomar (guitar); Roy Bittan (piano); Dennis Davis (drums); George Murray (bass); Warren Peace (backing vocals); Earl Slick (guitar)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 5, US 3

STATIONTOSTATIONDAVIDBOWIE

earthly of the kabbala's 10 'sephiroth', or 'stations'. On a later issue of the album, the back cover shows Bowie chalking the kabbalistic tree on the floor.

Bowie appears to be the one who *"drives like a demon from station to station"*, speeding through life angst-ridden and cocaine fuelled – the marching powder is namechecked – but *"one in a million"* nonetheless, imperious in his view over oceans and mountains. As the song shifts into Teutonic marching beat, declaiming that *"the European canon is here"* (ironic given its loping soul bassline), it's clear its singer is no longer awaiting the "Homo Superior" of "Oh! You Pretty Things", Bowie himself has become the "superbeing" he talked of in a 1976 *Playboy* interview.

The railroad imagery has resonance from another shaping influence on *Station To Station*, Bowie's role as Thomas Newton in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, which provides the album's cover. "The trains here are so strange," muses the alien Newton at one point. Another scene, that of Newton sprawled in a dentist's chair watching a bank of TV sets, is surely the inspiration for "TVC 15", a piece of sci-fi hokum in which Bowie slavers over a holographic woman. "That's a song about a television that ate his girlfriend," wisecracked Maslin at the time. Viewed from the era of cyber-porn and Facebook, the song looks prophetic, while its odd mix of barrelhouse piano and pounding, motorik rhythms hasn't worn badly.

The album's other two numbers are twin melodramas. When Bowie described "Word On A Wing" as "a hymn", he was suspected of being tricky, yet that's exactly what it is, an on-knee supplication to a higher power. *"Sweet name, you're born once again for me,"* Bowie almost sobs, the cry, perhaps, of a man scared by unwelcome visitations.

The closing "Wild Is The Wind" started life as the title song of a 1957 movie, superior schmaltz when originally sung by crooner Johnny Mathis, but elevated into soulfulness by the Nina Simone rendition that inspired Bowie. With minimal accompaniment (honours to Alomar are again due for his waves of shimmering guitar), Bowie's vocals lend it an intense, epic quality that's at odds with his claims of emotional detachment. Rarely has he sung better. An unlikely cover, over the years the song has become something of a signature.

Station To Station, too, has remained a peak in Bowie's canon. Wagnerian in intent – and accompanied by Bowie's musings on the Third Reich – its highs would shortly be followed by an *"all-time low"*.

"MAKING A BIT OF MONEY IS MY PRIME INTEREST..."

Detroit, 1976. An exiled Bowie tries to pass himself off as a picture of happiness. CHRIS CHARLESWORTH gets the lowdown on innumerable music and film projects in the pipeline... "Some commercial albums, some that possibly aren't as commercial..."

TAKEN FROM MELODY MAKER 13/03/1976

"I'M JUST DOING this tour for the money. I never earned any money before, but this time I'm going to make some. I think I deserve it, don't you?"

David Bowie is balanced delicately in an armchair in suite 1604 in the Pontchertain Hotel in Detroit, his legs bent and hunched up, gazing absently at his bare feet which, like the rest of him, look remarkably clean. In his blue tracksuit he looks healthy and, although he could add a few pounds in weight, his brain is as trim as his figure.

His hair, blond at the front and red at the back, has been groomed by his personal hairdresser. It is swept up in a quiff and held in place with water. His classic, Aryan features alternate between expressions of genuine warmth and cold contempt whenever he senses troubled waters.

His left eye is still strangely immobile, a legacy from the childhood injury he received, and it adds an incongruous touch to a rather aristocratic appearance. Even if he never opened his mouth, he would have found some niche in life purely on the strength of his looks.

With the possible exception of Bryan Ferry, no other contemporary musician is as much preoccupied with his image as Bowie. But, while Ferry remains the same, Bowie changes his with regularity, not only from tour to tour, but from month to month. One can never really tell, either, whether his replies to any interviewer are fact or fiction; his views on various subjects change according to whim.

A few months ago he was widely quoted as saying he never wanted to tour again, yet his current US tour is now in its third week and, according to the star of the show, things are going very nicely, thank you. Other interviews suggested that Bowie was becoming interested in radical right-wing politics, statements that he now shrugs off by explaining that he made them up to satisfy the interviewer's need for a sensational story.

Shock value, I guess. Perhaps he intended to jolt me by making the point that he was only touring for the money, a point he reiterated more than once during a 45-minute conversation in his hotel suite.

So let's get one thing straight from the start. The views and opinions of David Bowie as quoted below represent his statements made between 6.45pm and 7.30pm, US Eastern Standard time on Monday, March 1, 1976. What he's said before that date and what he might say afterwards, may vary considerably.

We began by talking about the current tour, a massive departure from the elaborate Diamond Dogs presentation two years ago. Simplicity is the keynote this time around, right down to the "white lights" effect designed by Scottish tour manager Eric Barrett. As I saw for myself later the same evening, it is wonderfully effective; quite stunning in fact.

"It's more theatrical than Diamond Dogs ever was," said Bowie, toying with an unlit Gitane and a Heineken. "It's by suggestion rather than by over propping. It relies on modern 20th-Century theatre concepts of lighting, and I think it comes over as being very theatrical. Whether the audiences are aware of it, I don't know. It doesn't look like a theatrical production, but it certainly is."

Was it getting out of hand before?

"No, it was just boring after a while. Once I got to Los Angeles and did the shows in the Amphitheatre there, I'd already done 30 of them and it was terrible. There's nothing more boring than a stylised show, because there was no spontaneity, no freedom of movement. Everything was totally choreographed and it was very stiff. It didn't look it if you went and saw the show once. The first time it was probably a gas, but there's nothing much in it if you are doing it every night. It just becomes repetition. I can't speak as an audience but certainly, as a performer, it was hard to keep it up, trekking all over the country doing the same thing night after night.

"This one changes almost every night. It's a lot looser. The only thing we have is a running order, but I even change that around. The lighting guys have lighting cues, but that's on spec as well."

It seems he has changed his onstage image yet again. "So I hear. I've heard I look like a cabaret performer, but I've never seen a cabaret performer so I wouldn't know. The reaction is a lot better and I guess that is because I'm still giving the theatre, but whether they want that or not I CONTINUES OVER»

REX FEATURES

"It's very theatrical..." Bowie revels in the stark stage sets of the Isolar tour, 1976

The Isolar band, 1976: Carlos Alomar, Bowie, George Murray, Stacy Heydon and Dennis Davis on drums. Inset right: the tour programme

don't know and I don't really care. The audiences are about a tour behind me, but then they always are. I'd get worried if they turned up in outfits I'd never seen before. I'd think I was a tour behind."

For the Diamond Dogs tour Bowie relegated his musicians to a position of scant importance, never even acknowledging their presence on stage. This time around, the musicians stand behind him, and towards the end of the show are introduced, For the record they are guitarist Carlos Alomar, who worked on *Station To Station*; Stacy Heydon, who came in at the last minute to replace Earl Slick; bassist George Murray, and drummer Dennis Davis, both from the *Station To Station* sessions; and keyboard player Tony Kaye, late of Badger and Yes, another last-minute addition.

"There are three blacks and three whites, including myself, and that's a good mixture," said Bowie. "They're all good musicians. Carlos and Dennis have been with me for two years, but the rest we assembled in eight days of rehearsal before the tour. The band will stay with me for the duration of the tour, but I won't need them when we've finished.

"I haven't kept a band together since the Spiders, and I don't want the responsibility of keeping one, it's too much money, anyway [*and*] a lot of problems that I don't need."

Musically Bowie has veered towards black music over the past two years, especially with *Young Americans*. He readily admits he has been copying what he's heard on the radio in a deliberate attempt to be commercial.

"I don't listen to it very much now, though," he said. "I don't like it very much now. It was a phase. I don't like very much music at all now, actually. I like performing with a band, but listening… not really. I've listened to a lot of Kraftwerk and any kind of, er, cute music like that, but there's very little happening musically that interests me now.

"My own recent music has been good, plastic soul, I think. It's not very complex, but it's enjoyable to write. I did most of it in the studio. It doesn't take very long to write… about 10, 15 minutes a song. I mean, with *Young Americans* I thought I'd better make a hit album to cement myself over here, so I went in and did it. It wasn't too hard, really."

Was John Lennon an important contributor to "Fame"?

"No, not really. I think he appreciates that. It was more the influence of having him in the studio that helped. There's always a lot of adrenalin flowing when John is around, but his chief addition to it all was the high-pitched singing of "Fame". The riff came from Carlos, and the melody and most of the lyrics came from me, but it wouldn't have happened if John hadn't been there, He was the energy, and that's why he's got a credit for writing it; he was the inspiration."

Roy Bittan, Bruce Springsteen's pianist, played on *Station To Station*. How did that come about?

"It was Eric Barrett, my road manager, who saw him and recommended him. I needed a pianist because Tony wasn't around and Mike Garson was off being a Scientologist somewhere, so I needed him. He impressed me a lot, but I've never seen him with Springsteen. I once saw Springsteen when he was just forming everything, at Max's in New York, and I was impressed by him but I didn't like the band. That was when I recorded three of his songs but they were never released. At the time I was intending to do an album of songs by New York people that I liked, but I never finished it."

In three years Bowie hasn't set foot in England. Any particular reason?

"I just haven't got around to it," he confessed. "Most of my affairs have been messed up so

GETTY, WIRE IMAGE

Down where things are hollow: Famous friends Bowie, Yoko and John

badly that I just hadn't time. There were plans at one time to take the Diamond Dogs tour to England, but I doubt if ever that show will see the light of day again. I've still got the scenery stored away in New York, so there's always a chance."

That tour must have been extraordinarily expensive to stage.

"Apparently so. I never saw any money from that tour. I'm only making money now. That's why I wanted to simplify things this time around, to make money. I'm managing myself now, simply because I've got fed up with managers that I've known."

How were relations between himself and Tony DeFries?

"I haven't seen him since the day I left him. I wouldn't know. Is he still in the business? I honestly don't know."

Bowie seemed a little reluctant to enlarge on this point, so I mentioned that DeFries was still managing Mick Ronson and asked whether Bowie had any opinions on Ronson's role in Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue. He seemed disinterested.

"Yeah, I heard all about that. I don't have any opinions. I honestly can't remember Mick that well nowadays. It's a long time ago. He's just like any other band member I've had. Maybe I should react more… Anyway, I'm not a great Dylan fan. I think he's a prick, so I'm not interested."

As his own manager, Bowie has honed his entourage down to three key people: Pat Gibbons (acting manager), Corinne 'Coco' Schwab (secretary) and Barbara DeWitt (press relations).

"My office is a suitcase that stays in my room. It's far better than before when I never knew what was going on, and this is how I used to do it back in England before. My last manager was Michael Lippman and he didn't cope very well. I think it was an experience for him, though. You'd better ask Michael Lippman why Earl Slick left me on the eve of this tour. He's managing him now."

Talk turned to films and Bowie brightened up considerably. He no longer sees himself as only a rock star, so I asked him whether movies would become his prime interest.

"No. Making a bit of money is my prime interest. I'm an artist and anything that makes money is OK. I don't know whether I'm an actor or not, and I won't know until I see the movie [*The Man Who Fell To Earth*] in a cinema with people around me. That'll be the test. I want to watch myself in that context. I acted or non-acted as best as I could in that film. It required non-acting because the character of Newton that I played is a very cold, unexpressive person. The thing he learns on Earth is emotion, which comes hard to him and reduces him to an alcoholic.

"I'd been offered a lot of scripts but I chose this one because it was the only one where I didn't have to sing or look like David Bowie. Now I think David Bowie looks like Newton. One thing that Nic Roeg [*the film's director*] is good at doing is seducing people into a role, and he seduced me completely. He told me after we'd finished it would take me a long time to get out of the role and he was dead right. After four months playing the role, I was Newton for six months afterwards, and now I'm gradually learning Max Radl for the next one."

Bowie's next movie in fact, as exclusively reported in *MM*, is likely to be based on Jack Higgins' best selling novel, *The Eagle Has Landed*, which is based on a fictitious plot to kidnap Winston Churchill during the last war. Bowie is cast as Max Radl, a German officer who organises the kidnap attempt from inside Germany.

"I'm getting into my Nazi bit for this one," he continued. "I have an inert left-hand and a patch over my left eye for the part. Michael Caine and Donald Sutherland are in it, too, so it'll be one hell of a film. Sutherland is the reason that I chose to do it – Sutherland has the money. If it wasn't for Sutherland and the money I wouldn't be interested. As it is, I'm more interested in a Bergman film called *The Serpent's Egg*, which is coming up, and I'd do that for nothing, just to work with Bergman."

Would he drop music in favour of acting if his career blossomed?

"Er, no, I don't think so. I just do anything as it comes up. I've learned to find a much calmer level of intensity these days. I don't push for much, but I seem to move a lot faster when I do things this way. I think I've done the bit that I needed to do in rock'n'roll. I've made my contribution to rock'n'roll, and the only thing I can do now, if I stay in rock'n'roll, is to have a rock'n'roll career. Not being very career-minded, I don't want a career in rock'n'roll.

"I couldn't do anything but survive now. Once you've made that initial boom, what else do you have to do? So I'm just resting around and picking up on all these things that have fascinated me. I've become interested in art over the last two years and I've done several silk screens and lithographs."

Was it that he was frightened of repeating himself in rock?

"It's not that so much. I didn't want my initial enthusiasm for rock'n'roll being mixed up with my own dissatisfaction with becoming a rock'n'roll careerist. In rock'n'roll the artist quickly becomes an archetype, and as soon as he becomes an archetype he has served his purpose.

"I don't believe it's possible for an artist to say more than two new things in rock'n'roll. One artist has one thing to say and it's such an ephemeral sort of culture that after he's said it, it's just a question of staying around. If you do strive to say something new, it gets interpreted as another way of staying around. They're doing it to Dylan at the moment, and poor old Springsteen has hardly started before they're saying it to him. And whether Patti Smith will ever get there, they're saying it about her. It's not that interesting after a certain point, anyway.

"I'm not disenchanted because I always believed when I started that Ziggy, for me, was what it was all about. I said it with Ziggy five years ago and I believe that you can go up or come down or be carried along by the tide for a few years. The only thing to do, if you want to contribute to culture, or politics, or music, or whatever, is to utilise your own persona rather than just music. The best way to do this is to diversify and become a nuisance everywhere."

"I DON'T BELIEVE IT'S POSSIBLE FOR AN ARTIST TO SAY MORE THAN TWO NEW THINGS IN ROCK'N'ROLL..."

But it must have been satisfying to have a massive American hit with "Fame".

"Well, it kind of put the cap on things. It told me I could finish now, pack it all in now. That meant I had done the two things I was supposed to do, which is to conquer this market and conquer the British market. Once you've done that, you can pretend to rest on your laurels and all the other clichés you can do when you hit the top. You can forget longevity and all the things that make you stay there, as far as I'm concerned. All that staying at CONTINUES OVER»

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Nein! Nein! Nein! Bowie was turned down for the role of Max Radl in *The Eagle Has Landed* – his disastrous audition was dubbed 'The Ego Has Landed' by director John Sturges. Bowie himself rejected roles as Captain Hook in *Hook*, The Joker in Tim Burton's *Batman* and Bond villain Max Zorin in *A View To A Kill*.

the top is just a heartache for me. I just want to do what I want to do, and first, that's make some money with this tour and enjoy making it at the same time.

"I wanted to use a new kind of staging, and I think this staging will become one of the most important ever. It will affect every kind of rock'n'roll art from now on, because it's the most stabilised move that I've ever seen in rock'n'roll. I've reverted to pure Brechtian theatre and I've never seen Brechtian theatre used like this since Morrison and The Doors, and even then Morrison never used white light like I do.

"I think it looks like a corrupted version of 1930s German theatre, what with the waistcoat, which has always been a favourite with me. I should have had a watch-chain to make it perfect. I'm trying to put over the idea of the European movement with the Dalí film [*before he arrives on stage, the Dalí-Buñuel film, Un Chien Andalou, is shown*] and playing Kraftwerk over the speakers. I'd like to get my hands on the new Eno album to play, actually, I think Side One is absolutely fabulous."

His sets change from night to night but all the songs from *Station To Station* are played, along with half a dozen songs from Bowie's past. Bowie says he's never been as loose onstage since the early days of the Spiders, and he's enjoying the experience. Despite his appearance onstage – severe and formal – he denies he's the "Thin White Duke" referred to on the album. It's someone else and he won't say who.

I asked which of the old songs he still liked to sing.

"I think 'Jean Genie' is a gas. I like that one. I still love 'Changes'. All the songs I still do I still like, but I'm not doing 'Golden Years' or 'Space Oddity'. I've really been very radical for this show and I won't do any hits for the sake of doing hits.

"I think people look on the show as an honest appearance, and that's why they develop such a strong empathy for it. For the first few minutes they are absolutely alarmed at what they are seeing, they don't understand it, but there's one point when it breaks out and people realise what it is all about. It's not honest, really, but then I've never been a let-it-all-hang-out entertainer. One thing I do is fabricate a personality for a stage. I was never a rock'n'roll singer. I was clumsy as a rock'n'roll singer but I do have a certain penchant for fabricating a character and portraying a cold, unemotional feeling.

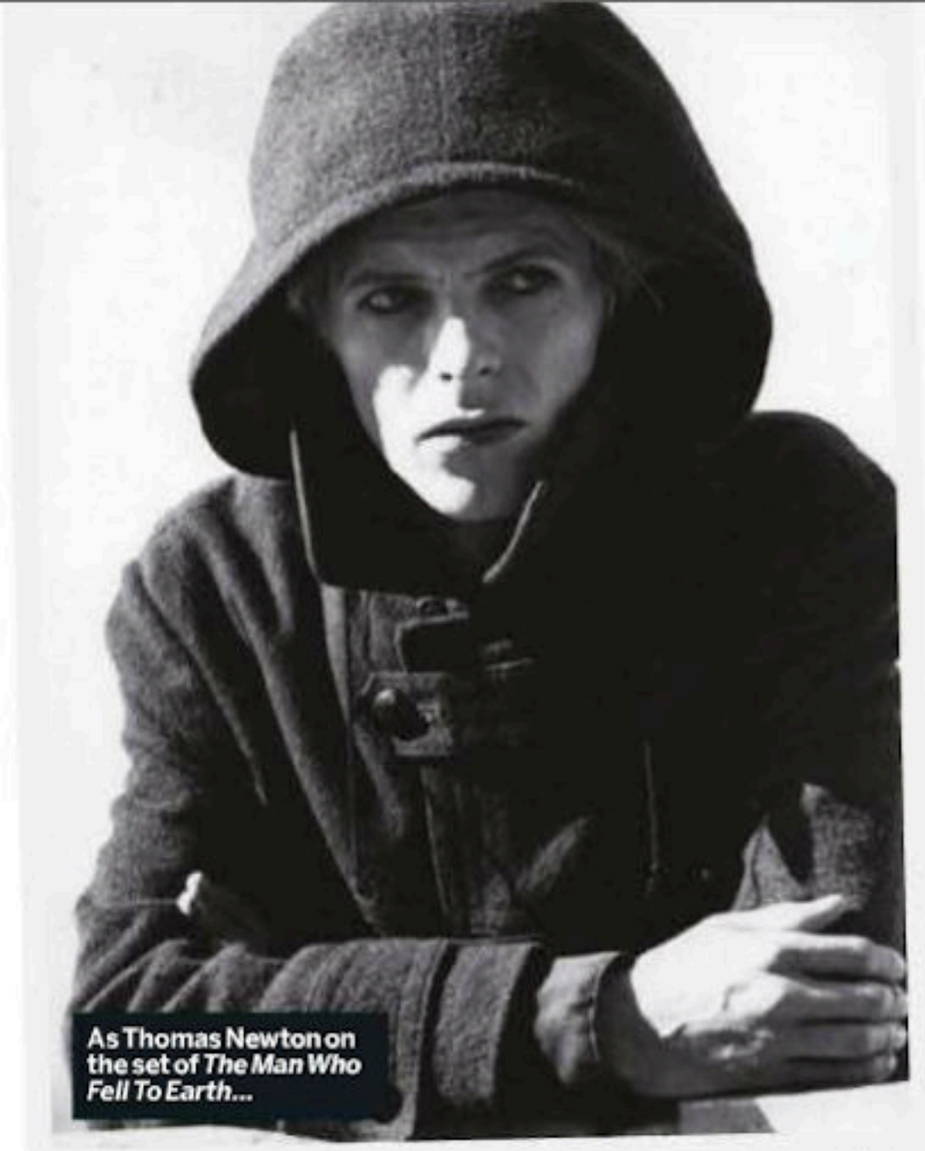
"I'm still giving them a persona, but that persona out there is possibly an exaggeration of all the things I feel about me. Maybe it's some aspect of me as a person blown up to lifesize. A lot of the other characters were blow-ups of other rock'n'rollers that I saw around. I'm more approachable onstage this time around, unlike the last time when the character I played was a paranoid refugee of New York City. That was about the collapse of a major city and I think I was right to be remote, don't you?"

I agreed. But was it necessary not even to acknowledge the presence of the audience or his group?

"Oh yes. That character was in a world of his own. This time I at least say 'good evening' to the people. Now you know that I'm not the warmest performer onstage, and I never have been, but that's because I feel too shy about talking to people onstage. I've never felt comfortable talking on stage. With Diamond Dogs I even wanted to have the band in the orchestra pit.

"If ever I have the audacity to do a Diamond Dogs tour again, I think I know how I would do it, and I will do it properly because of everything I've learned over the past few years. You know, unless you make some big mistakes you are never going to grow, you've got to make mistakes. I've made one a week, and if you don't make them then you won't become a self-invented man. I've got to learn to make mistakes to understand the character that I am clawing the air for. People like watching people who make mistakes, but they prefer watching a man who survives his mistakes. To make a mistake in life, and survive it, is the biggest kick of all.

"The so-called rebel figures are not popular because they're rebels, but because they've got over them. I think audiences go to rock concerts to obtain information and the artist is the one who provides that information. I don't know what the information is but it is something to do with survival. I'm sure that rock'n'roll has something to do with survival, and that survival instinct transcends the music, the words and everything else."



As Thomas Newton on the set of *The Man Who Fell To Earth...*

> **"I HAVE A CERTAIN PENCHANT FOR FABRICATING A CHARACTER AND PORTRAYING A COLD, EMOTIONAL FEELING..."**

It wasn't long ago, I mentioned that Bowie stated he wasn't going to tour again. He shrugged.

"Oh yes, I did, but I don't feel that way now. I love it. The other tours were misery, so painful. I had amazing amounts of people on the road with me. I had a management system that had no idea what it was doing and was totally self-interested and pompous. They never dealt with the people on the road, so I was getting all those problems.

"I was getting all the problems every night. Ten or 15 people would be coming to see me and laying their problems on me because the management couldn't or wouldn't deal with it. For me touring was no fun, no fun at all. They were little problems, but to each individual they were important. I understood all their problems but I couldn't cope with them all, so the two major tours I did were horrendous experiences. I hated every minute of them, so I used to say I'd never tour again. Then I would be talked into doing it again to make somebody some money.

"This time, though, I will be touring again. We've got it down to a sensible number and it works. It's the most efficient tour I've been on, and I can truthfully say it's the most efficient tour I've seen. Everybody on this tour is in a wonderful mood, and we're well through half the tour. This time no-one comes to me with problems, so we get together as people instead, and I actually find I'm spending time with the band, which is rare. I've actually written on the road this time. The band and I have written three things and I've never been able to do that before.

"If I'm in charge I'll tour again, whereas before I always thought there was somebody better at doing this kind of thing. It wasn't until Lennon pointed it out to me that I realised maybe the artist is as good at managing as anybody else. It was John that sorted me out all the way down the line. He took me on one side, sat down, and told me what it was all about and I realised I was very naïve. I still thought you had to have somebody else who dealt with these things called contracts, but now I have a better understanding of showbusiness business."

And the right-wing politics I had read about?

"That was just bullshit, something I said off the cuff. Some paper wanted me to say something and I didn't have much to say so I made things up. They took it all in."

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Transmission! In November'75, Bowie scheduled a bizarre satellite interview on Russell Harty's TV show. (Fellow guest: Kurt Vonnegut.) But Spanish authorities demanded the link be requisitioned so they could broadcast General Franco's funeral mass. Bowie, not so politely, refused the request.

...and with co-star Candy Clark, who played love interest Mary Lou

Why had he chosen to live in the US?
"Because I didn't have any money to get out. I was told I couldn't go back to England because I had tax problems there and didn't have the money to pay them, but now I do, so I'm going back. Unfortunately, I'm going to have to live in Switzerland, because I want to keep my money. I'd like to live in England because I don't like America at all as a place to live, except maybe New Mexico.

"I haven't lived properly in America. I've been here but I haven't lived. I've been in Los Angeles, coping with a town that I consider to be the most repulsive wart on the backside of humanity. I'd rather live here in Detroit than in Los Angeles."

Bowie has formed his own film production company, Bewlay Brothers Ltd, which will handle his movie business in the future and, he hopes, produce films of its own, especially films of artistic, rather than commercial, merit.

"I've been trained in a career as a rock'n'roll singer and I now see that I do that very well. Therefore, like any good chap who has a career, I should utilise my talents and training that I've got and make some money out of it. You have to own up to that matter.

"It's all very well being No 1 Protest Kid, but you have to consider whether you are just protesting to stay around or whether you really mean it. If that's the case you won't be at the top of the hit parade all the time, but if you think your protest lies elsewhere you'll change horses and quickly earn some money out of what you're good at. That's what I'm doing now, but I'll only do it if I'm enjoying stuff.

"I'm enjoying this tour so I'll do some more tours. Albums? I'll make some commercial albums and I'll make some albums that possibly aren't as commercial. I'll probably keep alternating, providing myself with a hit album to make the money to do the next album, which probably won't sell as well."

At that point Bowie wanted to finish, but some quick probing revealed that he has completed an electronic album ("Without vocals that you'd recognise"). Also, he still has plans to produce a record with Iggy Pop, who was at the hotel and seemed in much better health than usual. ("I'm a good lad, I look after him" – Bowie). And exactly the same show will be coming to London, though probably with some additional numbers.

As a parting shot I asked David if he still professed to be bisexual. Momentary shock.

"Oh Lord, no. Positively not. That was just a lie. They gave me that image so I stuck to it pretty well for a few years. I never adopted that stance. It was given to me. I've never done a bisexual action in my life, onstage, record or anywhere else. I don't think I even had a gay following much. A few glitter queens, maybe.

"You know the funniest thing of all," he continued talking like a conspirator. "I'd never heard of Lou Reed until somebody said my stuff was influenced by him. So when I heard that, I started saying it to myself, that my songs were influenced by Lou Reed. It seemed the obvious thing to say, and that's when I started getting interested in Lou. The same with Iggy. It wasn't until people told me my music was very sort of Detroity that I happened to discover Iggy Pop and the Stooges. I thought, 'What a great name,' and although I'd never heard them, I used to tell everybody who asked that I liked them a lot. Then I got around to meeting Iggy, but it wasn't until months later that I heard anything he'd written.

"It's marvellous. A lot of people provide me with quotes. They suggest all kinds of things to say and I do, because, really, I'm not very hip at all. Then I go away and spout it all out and that makes it easier for people to classify me. People dissect the songs and say that's influenced by someone or other, but I don't know whether I'm influenced. All I know is I'm drinking a beer and enjoying myself."

With that Bowie retired to be made up for the evening's concert – just a light dab of eyeliner and plenty of water to keep the hair in place.

The concert was a huge success, capped with a couple of encores. All the material from *Station To Station* was aired, along with choice selections like "Changes", "Fame", "The Jean Genie", "Diamond Dogs" and, most appropriately, "Panic In Detroit". The highlight of the show was definitely "Five Years", though, which soared to a climax as the band poured on layers of powerchords behind Bowie's agonised vocals.

Dressed in black pants, waistcoat, and a crisp white shirt, Bowie still seemed cold and formal, but towards the end he loosened up, grinning and flashing asides, casually smoking Gitanes and playing to the front rows which, because of the dance of bright white lights, were as illuminated as the stage.

A picture of health and happiness. It's hard to believe.

RELEASE DATE 14 | JANUARY | 1977

LOW

Bowie escapes from LA, disappears into Europe, and invents the future. *By Damien Love*

DAVID BOWIE ALWAYS took uncommon interest in his album covers – and, indeed, other people's; during his paranoid occult trip in LA, he grew convinced The Rolling Stones were sending messages through theirs. For his 11th album, he chose to present the record as a science fiction movie. As with *Station To Station*, *Low*'s sleeve image comes from *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, but here the association is far more explicit: this same heavily treated still had been the film's teaser poster in 1976.

The sci-fi movie of *Low* could have been titled *Escape From LA*. Bowie has cited it as a continuation of *Station To Station*, and echoes do persist. But *Low* is far more of a reaction to the magnificent neuroses of *Station To Station*. It is Bowie's flight from rock to art, from Hollywood canyons to the European canon.

If *Low* is a sci-fi movie, it is Chris Marker's *La Jetée*. It comes in odd fragments, stunned and frozen moments, loaded with sadness for the future, anxious nostalgia for the present, reluctant mistrust of the past. At first, it seems chill, stark, remote. Eventually, it is revealed as enormously emotional.

And then you notice its weird, buried humour. After all, as well as mystery, the cover presents that amazingly corny "low profile" pun on Bowie's retreat. The gag came late: the album's name was changed so close to the last minute that initial cassettes went out still labelled with the original title, *New Music Night And Day*. RCA's advertising slogan is another hangover: "Two sides of Bowie you've never heard before."

The strapline reflected the label's perplexity at the album, but it's a perfect fit. "Speed Of Life" fades in alarmingly, and is over almost before you realise it is unprecedented for Bowie: an instrumental. When words do come, hot on the filthy heels of Carlos Alomar's poisonous riff in "Breaking Glass", they are blunter, stranger, more cut-up than anything before.

A funk fuzz fragment, "Breaking Glass" opens *Low*'s strange series of rooms. Here, a chamber where occult rituals are practised and neurotic jokes cracked. In the panicking, broken disco of "What In The World", it's the room where the little girl with grey eyes cowers from the gloom and Iggy Pop's backing growls (reminding you that it was *The Idiot*, the downer masterpiece Bowie made for Iggy before *Low*, that laid *Low*'s groundwork).

With "Sound And Vision", we enter a therapeutic cocoon where the singer wants to drift into solitude. Released as lead single, "Sound And Vision" is *Low*'s ideal summary: a perfect pop song that sounds like it was made by people trying to forget, or struggling to remember, what pop songs are. It leads to another internal space: the dim hotel garage of "Always Crashing In The Same Car", where Bowie rolls in suicidal circles, predicting post-punk's Ballardian strain in a hesitant, pulsing instant.

The distraught, blank epic "Be My Wife" gazes out on a world full only of places Bowie has left. He leaves again for "A New Career In A New Town". Thanks to *Low*'s influence, the seductive myth of the "Berlin trilogy" (launched by this album created mostly in the French countryside), the impact on *Low* of the German *kosmische* wave is better understood today than in 1977. The town in question is not Berlin so much as Düsseldorf – specifically, Neu! man Klaus Dinger's other band, La Düsseldorf's 1976 single, "Silver Cloud", a likely blueprint.

But just as they never had "Be My Wife"'s barrelhouse piano, or the indestructible R&B chassis of Alomar-Davis-Murray, the German motoriks never pulled out wailing western harmonica like Bowie plays here. It's not the electronic music's spacey optimism that lingers, but that human yearning for what's being left behind.

Tony Visconti has recalled Bowie was having difficulty writing – like "Speed Of Life", "New Career" was originally intended to have words

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"It's oddly the music of now – not exactly what is popular, but what seems right for the times."
MICHAEL WATTS, MELODY MAKER, JANUARY 22, 1977

"Low is the ONLY contemporary rock album."
IAN MACDONALD, NME, JANUARY 22, 1977

TRACKMARKS | Low

1. Speed Of Life ★★★★★
2. Breaking Glass ★★★★★
3. What In The World ★★★★★
4. Sound And Vision ★★★★★
5. Always Crashing In The Same Car ★★★★★
6. Be My Wife ★★★★★
7. A New Career In A New Town ★★★★★
8. Warszawa ★★★★★
9. Art Decade ★★★★★
10. Weeping Wall ★★★★
11. Subterraneans ★★★★★

RELEASED: January 14, 1977
LABEL: RCA
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Tony Visconti
RECORDED AT: Château d'Hérouville, Hérouville, France, and Hansa Studio By The Wall, West Berlin
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, ARP, tape horn, brass, synthetic strings, saxophones, tape cellos, guitar, pump bass, harmonica, piano, prearranged percussion, Chamberlin); Brian Eno (vocals, mini-Moog, splinter mini-Moog, Report ARP, Rimmer EMI, guitar treatments, piano, Chamberlin); Carlos Alomar (rhythm guitars, guitar); Dennis Davis (percussion); Ricky Gardiner (guitars); George Murray (bass); Roy Young (pianos, Farfisa organ); Peter and Paul (cellos); Eduard Meyer (cellos); Mary Visconti, Iggy Pop (backing vocals).
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US 11

– but what happens on *Low* goes beyond writer's block. *Low* finds Bowie profoundly suspicious of songwriting methods he'd built his career on. 'Fear Of Narrative' is another plausible alternative title.

On Side Two – the famous "instrumental side" that isn't instrumental at all – Bowie leaves his rooms and goes out into new towns. Marked by Eno's ambience and minimalists like Steve Reich and Philip Glass, the songs are textural sketches of Iron Curtain cities rusting after the rain, as refracted through Bowie's troubled interior landscape.

"Warszawa" calls up the mood Bowie felt in the Polish capital during a brief train stop in 1976. "Art Decade" presents another *Low* pun, suggesting deco splendours rotting into weedy, pastoral decay. The chiming "Weeping Wall", with Bowie wailing after "Scarborough Fair", conjures both with Jerusalem's ancient western wall and the new wall scarring the city that forced Jews out. Finally, the record's most moving moment, "Subterraneans", is Bowie's imaginary, ruminative portrait of East Berlin, the hipsters lost behind the wall remembering what used to be, represented by his gorgeous, half-caught jazz saxophone.

Fittingly, for the record that launched Bowie's collaboration with Eno, who brought his interest in process art along with his briefcase synthesiser, the key players have discussed the album's making in detail. We know, for example, Tony Visconti created side one's extraordinary whomping drum sound via his Eventide Harmonizer, the pitch-shifting device he pitched to Bowie this way: "It fucks with the fabric of time." And that Eno arrived at "Warszawa" by copying random notes Visconti's four-year-old son Delaney plucked at the studio piano.

Yet mystique is preserved. It's hazy, for example, to what extent Bowie's unused *The Man Who Fell To Earth* soundtrack was recycled. Bowie has said only "Subterraneans" is a hangover, yet Eno has suggested "Weeping Wall" also drew from the film music. When *Low* was reissued in 1991, two supposed outtakes were included: the proto-industrial throb "All Saints" and the exquisite, elusive and wintry "Some Are". Visconti, however, says he can't recall those songs at all. On the other hand, he has claimed there are "dozens" of unheard *Low* songs.

No matter how much comes to light, *Low* remains more than the sum of its parts. It leads to *"Heroes"*, yet it stands apart. As "Subterraneans" fades to orange, the only place you want to go is looping back to the fade-in of "Speed Of Life". That's *Low*: 38 minutes that last forever.

RELEASE DATE 14 | OCTOBER | 1977

"HEROES"

Divided city, divided soul. Bowie digs deeper into Berlin – and into himself. *By Alastair McKay*

VIEWED FROM A distance of more than three decades, the self-consciousness of *"Heroes"* is obvious. You could start with the inverted commas around the title, a common literary device at the time, but also an indication of a level of irony in the heroism under discussion. Observe the cover, a photograph by Masayoshi Sukita on which the singer appears, pale-faced, hands folded in a semaphore of dislocation, looking like a blow-dried, blouson-wearing version of an Egon Schiele self-portrait (though any Bowie aficionado will tell you that the image is actually styled after Erich Heckel's *Roquairol*, with a nod, perhaps, to the same painter's 1917 work, *Young Man*).

And consider the music, which – with the exception of the glorious title track – makes few concessions to commerce. Yes, there is rhythm here, a fair bit of muscle and sinew, but Bowie's lyrics are far from celebratory, and rarely touch on anything physical or uncomplicatedly romantic. You could dance, certainly, to half of the record, but you'd be obliged to spend the other half in a state of existential collapse.

Nor can the songs be nailed down. The poppy melodies which had leavened the first side of *Low* are nowhere to be found, though there is a large dose of the ambient friction from that record's second side. There are tunes, though, and they flit restlessly between a kind of inverted disco – a musical argument between the guitars of Carlos Alomar (lyrical) and Robert Fripp (industrial) – and Eno's electronic crop-circles, which loop together in a maze of insistent melodies leading nowhere in particular.

Bowie, enjoying his isolation in Berlin, remained enthralled by the electronic music of Neu! and Kraftwerk (Bowie nodded to Florian Schneider in the pulsing "V-2 Schneider") and was heavily under the influence of Eno (although Tony Visconti, not Eno, co-produced). But the real sense you get from *"Heroes"* is of an artist relaxing into a new identity. The lessons Eno brought to *Low* have been absorbed, and his "Oblique Strategies" – artistic Tarot cards – were used to steer Bowie past creative roadblocks. What you hear is a kind of kinetic, alienated soul music; European, and narrated, as ever, in the Mockney patois of Anthony Newley.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Truly modern music for a modern world. It has its failures, I'm sure, but its courage cannot be denied."
ALLAN JONES, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 1, 1977

"These new sketches are among the most mature and trenchant Bowie has achieved... This time Bowie and Eno have created something of real substance and intrinsic worth."
ANGUS MACKINNON, NME, OCTOBER 8, 1977

Soul, perhaps, is a misleading term for a record which celebrates, and attempts to explode, alienation. It might be easier to reach into psychology and call it *psyche* music, because there is precious little space here for relationships, or love, or even lust. But there is much examination of the ghosts of the self. Bowie has noted that while he was personally happy during the recording, and much of *"Heroes"* sounds buoyant, the lyrics leaked from "a nook in the unconscious" and veered towards the psychotic.

These ingredients really shouldn't blend together, and RCA's marketing department could scarcely have been more perturbed. The album was sold with the line: "There's Old Wave. There's New Wave. And there's David Bowie."

Whichever wave it washed up on, *"Heroes"* is the centrepiece of Bowie's "Berlin trilogy". There's no denying the influence of the Cold War's divided city on the mood. The three instrumentals on side two – "Sense Of Doubt", "Moss Garden" and "Neuköln" – are like a soundtrack to the geopolitical anxieties of the day, and "V-2 Schneider" makes a rather baffling reference to a Nazi missile system (as well as a member of Kraftwerk).

But it's not a concept album. The sensual final track, "The Secret Life Of Arabia" seems to take place in a cinematic desert, while also providing Rod Stewart with some of the disco moves he would employ to such frightening effect on "Da' Ya' Think I'm Sexy".

Some have seen the lyrics of the opening track, "Beauty And The Beast", as a reference to

TRACKMARKS | "Heroes"

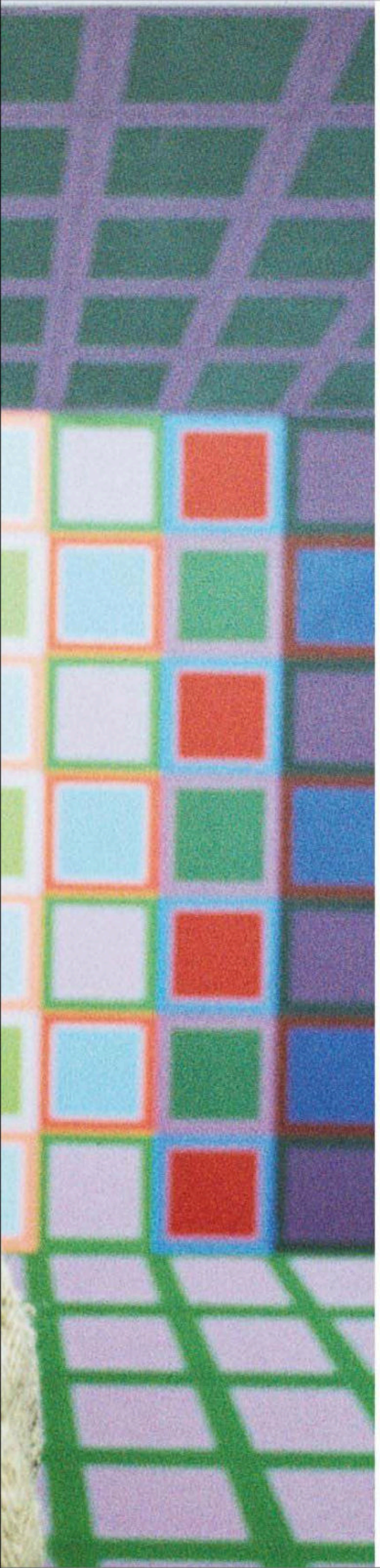
1. **Beauty And The Beast** ★★★★
2. **Joe The Lion** ★★★★
3. **"Heroes"** ★★★★★
4. **Sons Of The Silent Age** ★★★★
5. **Blackout** ★★★★
6. **V-2 Schneider** ★★★★★
7. **Sense of Doubt** ★★★★
8. **Moss Garden** ★★★★
9. **Neukoln** ★★★★
10. **The Secret Life Of Arabia** ★★★★★

RELEASED: October 14 1977
LABEL RCA
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Tony Visconti
RECORDED AT: Hansa Studio By The Wall, Berlin
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, keyboards, guitars, saxophone, koto, background vocals); Carlos Alomar (rhythm guitar); Dennis Davis (drums, percussion); George Murray (bass); Brian Eno (synthesisers, keyboards, guitar treatments); Robert Fripp (lead guitar); Tony Visconti (backing vocals); Antonia Maass (backing vocals).
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 3; US 35

the friction between West and East, and there may be some of that, but Bowie tends to explain the song in terms of the demons he was trying to escape when he fled Los Angeles. ("*I wanted to believe me/I wanted to be good/I wanted no distractions/Like every good boy should.*") Whatever, it's an extraordinary song, propelled by a kind of hysterical exhilaration. And, yes, "Joe The Lion", "Sons Of The Silent Age" and the Side One closer, "Blackout'" all reflect a sense of friction sought out by Bowie when he moved to Berlin, but they're not really about the city. Indeed, a close textual analysis of the lyrics misses the point: most of these songs were composed in the studio, with Bowie coughing out phrases from his subconscious. They are like jottings from a dream, with no fixed meaning. It's an anxiety dream. Divided city, divided soul.

But the title track is unavoidably rooted in Berlin. It describes a romantic liaison witnessed by Bowie from the windows of the Hansa By The Wall. The precise inspiration for the song has been a matter of debate, though Visconti has claimed that the illicit kiss witnessed by Bowie was between him and backing singer Antonia Maass. Bowie, though, insists that the song is more broadly autobiographical, symbolising an escape from his own personal hell. It is, he says, a healing song, in which the message is "we can get out of this, I'll be OK."

Well, maybe. The point about the song is that it projects a mood of triumph, thanks to Bowie's overpowering vocal performance, but the exultant swell of the music is underpinned by drones and delays and oscillation, which wrap a mist of doubt around it. Even in the most optimistic interpretation, the triumph of the song's protagonists is temporary ("*We can be us, just for one day*"). I always read it as about lovers from either side of the wall meeting, and then dying in a hail of fire from the lookout tower ("*Standing, by the wall/And the guns/Shot above our heads*"). Maybe that's wrong, but the beauty of the song is the way it remains open to interpretation. Like *"Heroes"* the album, it is a masterpiece of anxiety and misplaced optimism.



"MY OWN FUTURE SLIPS BY. I'M PREPARED FOR ITS END..."

Just arrived at the Dorchester from Berlin, Bowie comes clean to ALLAN JONES about those LA years, the slow death of Ziggy, the pessimism behind *Low* and *"Heroes"*... Oh, and that unfortunate business at Victoria Station...

TAKEN FROM
MELODY MAKER
29/10/1977

THURSDAY AFTERNOON waltzes with the grace of Astaire on Styrofoam heels through the swinging doors of the Dorchester, to be met by a venerable welcome. Brash, playboy confidence is at once surrendered to the air of mellow retreat that haunts the atmosphere like the foretaste of old age.

A cosmopolitan chorus of accents embracing several continents provides a fractured soundtrack to the inconspicuous efficiency of the darting platoons of bellboys and porters, who look, in their smart green uniforms, like the well-scrubbed buglers of some private army.

Their genteel buoyancy is a subtle contrast to the grim and laboured service of the older butlers, who carry silver tea-trays to impatient customers with a one-toe shuffle across the verdant wall-to-wall that recalls the hesitant walk of arthritic tightrope walkers out for a stroll above Niagara's furious currents.

Thursday afternoon wonders where it will find the European Man.

David Bowie's hands flutter before him as if he was attempting to describe some indefinable abstract design to a blind man, or attempting, even, to conjure from the space before him a tap-dancing showbusiness dove.

He smiles quickly and nervously. Thin lips spread narrowly over tiny rodent teeth. His laugh is like the crackling bark of static. Infectious, nevertheless. He chatters briskly, but without impatience. His accent will veer from the clipped Cockney

CONTINUES OVER»

CORBIS

Lust for live: backing Iggy Pop on tour, 1977

inflections of Michael Caine's Harry Palmer to the smooth theatrical modulations and husky definitions of an actor in a provincial company impersonating some elder statesman of the stage with impertinent skill.

He is so entertainingly polite that you feel sure he could charm the wings off an angel.

David Bowie is in London for the solitary purpose of selling his new album. And he makes no elaborate excuse for the frustrating brevity of his individual engagement with the media.

"The only reason I've decided to do these interviews," he later admits, "is to prove my belief in the album. Both *"Heroes"* and *Low* have been met with confused reactions. That was to be expected, of course. But I didn't promote *Low* at all, and some people thought my heart wasn't in it.

"This time I wanted to put everything into pushing the new album. I believe in the last two albums, you see, more than anything I've done before. I mean, I look back on a lot of my earlier work and, although there's much that I appreciate about it, there's not a great deal that I actually like. I don't think they're very likeable albums at all.

"There's a lot more heart and emotion in *Low* and, especially, the new album. And, if I can convince people of that, I'm prepared to be stuck in this room on the end of a conveyer belt of questions that I'll do my best to answer."

This is an opinion. David Bowie's two most recent albums, recorded in Berlin in collaborations with Brian Eno, are among the most adventurous and notably challenging records yet thrust upon the rock audience. Inevitably controversial, these albums have combined the theories and techniques of modern electronic music with lyrics that have found Bowie dispensing with traditional forms of narrative in pursuit of a new musical vocabulary adequate to the pervasive mood of despair and pessimism that he has divined in contemporary society.

"Towards the end of my 'stay' in America," he reflects, "I realised that what I had to do was to experiment. To discover new forms of writing. To evolve, in fact, a new musical language. That's what I set out to do. That's why I returned to Europe."

David Bowie, as you reach this sentence, is explaining the circumstances and sequence of events that provoked his retreat from his exile in America and his eventual decision to return to Europe.

"The conditions were thus," he begins, his hands busily searching for a pack of Gitanes. "I was at a point where I wanted to leave America. I had been, as I like to put it, 'staying' there for more than two years. I'm wary of saying that I 'lived' there. 'Living' in America is a real commitment, and it was a commitment I wasn't prepared to make.

"So, as I say, I'd been 'staying' there for some time, and I realised that I'd become tired of the country. And I was also getting quite tired with my methods of writing. I wanted, generally, to re-evaluate what I was doing.

"I realised that I'd exhausted that particular environment and the effect of that environment upon my writing. I was afraid that if I continued to work in that environment I would begin repeating myself. I felt that that was the way I was heading.

"There was no enjoyment in the working process – I'd exclude from that *Station To Station*. That was fairly exciting because it was like a plea to come back to Europe for me. It was one of those self-chat things that one has with oneself from time to time."

He suddenly throws down his pack of cigarettes as if annoyed with himself. "Christ no… what am I [*saying?*] *Young Americans* was damn depressing. It was a terribly traumatic time. I was in a terrible state. I was absolutely infuriated that I was still in rock'n'roll.

"And not only in it, but had been sucked right into the centre of it. I had to move out. I'd never

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

On September 20, 1977, Bowie returned to London to attend the funeral of Marc Bolan in Golders Green. Struck by nostalgia, Bowie took the opportunity to drive past his old house – Haddon Hall in Southend Road, Beckenham – where his former landlord duly presented him with a bill for rent in arrears…

CORBIS, LFI

intended to become so involved in rock'n'roll… and there I was in Los Angeles, right in the middle of it.

"Whether it's fortunate or not, I don't know, but I'm absolutely and totally vulnerable to suggestion by environment, and environment and circumstances affect my writing tremendously. To the point of absurdity sometimes.

"I look back on some things in total horror… And, anyway, I began to realise that the environment of Los Angeles, of America, was by this time detrimental to my writing and my work. It was no longer an inspiration to be caught in that environment.

"I realised that that was why I was feeling so claustrophobic and cut off. I was adopting such a hypocritical stance. There was this incredible fight between materialism and aestheticism. My commitment has certainly never been to rock'n'roll. I've made no secret of that. I was just a hack painter who wanted to find a new medium to work in, frankly.

"And rock looked like a very good vehicle. But one was always fluctuating between the temptation to become a rock star and the sentimental ties with wanting to be an artist – and there I was living right in the middle of this crazy and filthy rock'n'roll circus. It really was no more than a circus.

"And I should not have been in it. I should not have become such a major part of it. It was frustrating for me. Now I'm fit and happy and well again. I'm enjoying the process of work for the first time in years. It's more than work. That's why I say that I'm not interested in posterity.

"I'm now more concerned with my work being appreciated on a more personal level. Once I had all of those big dreams. Oh, I had those dreams, man. Great ambitions. I had them until I learned about simply enjoying the process of working and the process of living.

"I'm happy now. Content. I feel more than a product on an assembly line and no more a means of support for 10,000 people who seem to revolve around every fart that I made."

David Bowie crushes out a Gitane and immediately another is between his lips. His finger flicks at his lighter.

"My role as an artist in rock," he says, "is rather different to most. I encapsulate things very quickly, in a very short space of time. Over two or three months usually. And generally my policy has been that as soon as a system or process works, it's out of date. I move on to another area. Another piece of time.

"I have to answer these questions in naïve analogies, I find, because I've always fought against considering my role, my position in this thing, this rock'n'roll game.

"I've never wanted to consider myself a part of it. It tends to hinder me. That's when I start pulling on my hat of solitude. That's when I usually clear off to Japan or somewhere I never intended to become a part of at all. Yet, at the same time, yes, I've challenged it and enjoyed – occasionally – the controversy.

"But you wouldn't believe how much of it was entirely unwitting. I think I did play outside the boundaries of what is considered the general area of rock'n'roll. Some of it was just pure petulance, some of it was arrogance, some of it was unwitting, but inevitably, I kept moving ahead.

"Ziggy, particularly, was created out of a certain arrogance. But, remember, at that time I was young and I was full of life, and that seemed like a very positive artistic statement. I thought that was a beautiful piece of art. I really did. I thought that was a grand kitsch painting. The whole guy.

"Then that fucker wouldn't leave me alone for years. That was when it all started to sour. And it soured so quickly you wouldn't believe it. And it took me an awfully long time to level out. My whole personality was affected. Again, I brought that upon myself.

"THAT FUCKER ZIGGY WOULDN'T LEAVE ME ALONE FOR YEARS, THAT WAS WHEN IT ALL STARTED TO SOUR…"

"I can't say I'm sorry when I look back, because it provoked such an extraordinary set of circumstances in my life. I thought I might as well take Ziggy out to interviews as well. Why leave him on the stage? Why not complete the canvas? Looking back, it was completely absurd.

"It became very dangerous. I really did have doubts about my sanity. I can't deny that the experience affected me in a very exaggerated and marked manner. I think I put myself very dangerously near the line. Not in a physical sense, but definitely in a mental sense. I played mental games with myself to such an extent that I'm now very relieved and happy to be back in Europe and feeling very well… But, then, you see, I was always the lucky one.

"*David Live*," says David Bowie, "was the final death of Ziggy. God, that album. I've never played it. The tension it must contain must be like vampire's teeth coming down on you. And that photo on the cover. My God, it looks as if I've just stepped out of the grave.

"That's actually how I felt. That record should have been called 'David Bowie Is Alive And Well And Living Only In Theory'."

"Berlin," Bowie observes reflecting upon the environment in which he has recorded his last two albums, "is a city made up of bars for sad, disillusioned people to get drunk in. I've taken full advantage of working there to examine the place quite intensively. One never knows how long it's going to remain there. One fancies that it's going very fast.

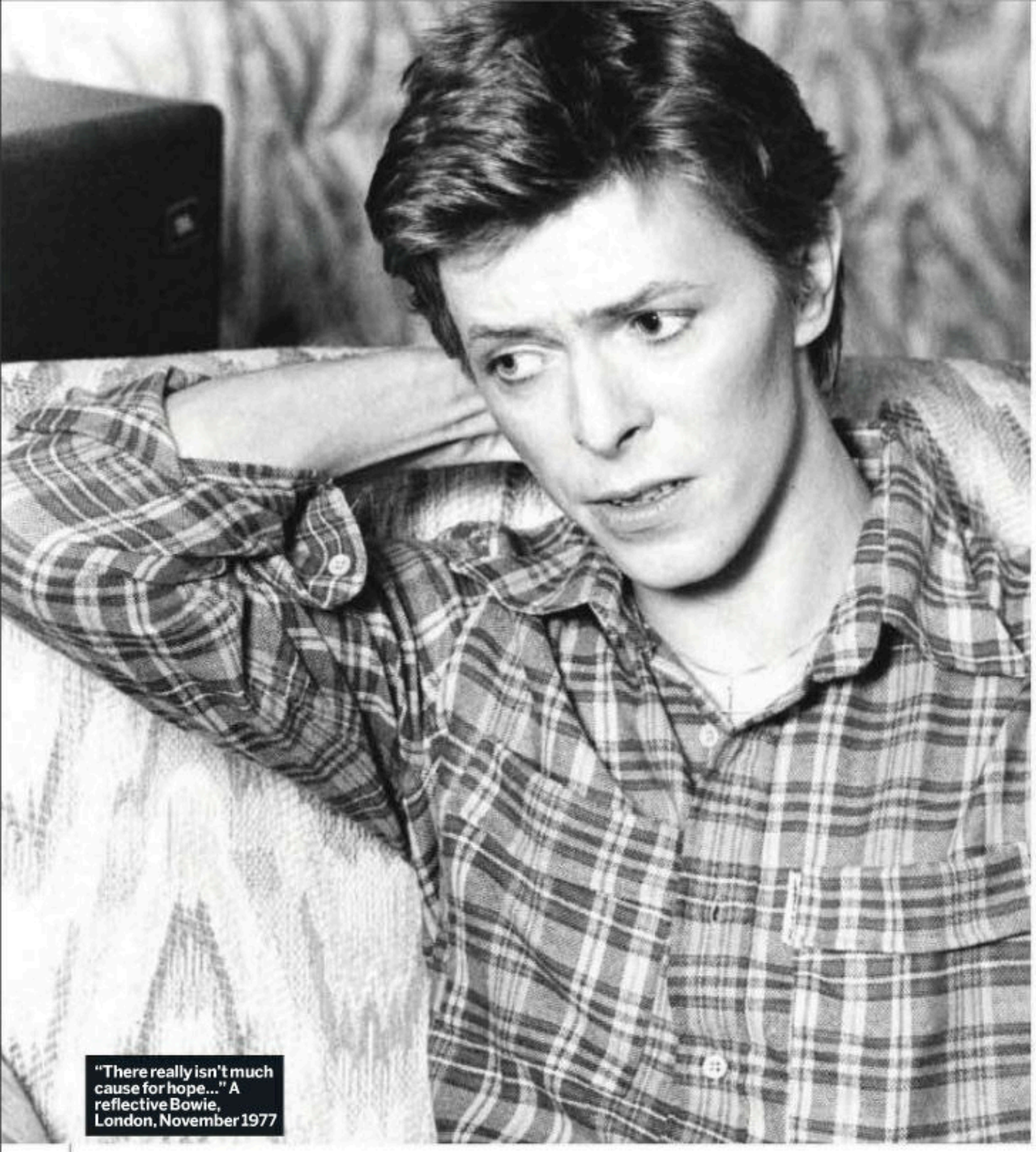
"That's one of the reasons, sure, that I was attracted to the city. It's a feeling that I really tried to capture in the paintings I did. I made a series of paintings while I was there of the Turks that live in the city. There's a track on the new album called "Neuköln", and that's the area of Berlin where the Turks are shackled in very bad conditions.

"They are very much an isolated community in the city. It's very sad. And that kind of reality obviously contributed to the mood of *Low* and *"Heroes"*.

"I mean, having encountered an experience like that it's hard to sing 'Let's all think about peace and love…' No… David, why did you say that? That was a stupid remark. Because that's exactly where you should arrive at a sense of compassion.

The title track of *"Heroes"* is about facing that kind of reality and standing up to it. The only heroic act one can fucking well pull out of the bag in a situation like that is to get on with life and derive some joy from the very simple pleasure of remaining alive, despite every attempt being made to kill you." CONTINUES OVER»

In the studio, with Robert Fripp (left) and Eno (right)



"There really isn't much cause for hope..." A reflective Bowie, London, November 1977

It will be remembered that Bowie's performances in London last year were prefaced by his controversial pronouncements on Britain and the possibility of fascist rule here. His comments were interpreted by some as advocacy of extreme right-wing politics: others saw in his remark a prophetic nature, a warning rather than a gesture of support for fascist policies.

"I can't clarify those statements," Bowie says wearily when the subject arises. "All I can say is that I've made my two or three glib, theatrical observations on English society, and the only thing I can now counter with is to state that I'm NOT a fascist. I'm apolitical.

"The more I travel the less sure I am about exactly which political philosophies are commendable. The more government systems I see, the less enticed I am to give my allegiance to any set of people, so it would be disastrous for me to adopt a definitive point of view, or to adopt a party of people and say, 'these are my people.'

"I guess it was all pretty glib. But then again, I'm not one for delicate social niceties. If I take a jump into the pool, I generally swallow all the water."

He is reminded of his fascist salute to the country when he arrived at Victoria Station and is asked to define its significance.

He virtually explodes from his chair.

"That didn't happen. THAT DID NOT HAPPEN. I was so livid with that cameraman. I waved. I just WAVED. Believe me. On the life of my child, I waved. And the bastard caught me. In MID-WAVE, man. And, God, did that photo get some coverage... as if I'd be foolish enough to pull a stunt like that. I died when I saw that photo. And even the people who were with me said, 'David! How could you? The bastards. I didn't...

"GOD, I just don't believe in all that."

"WHO WANTS TO DRAG THEIR OLD DECAYING FRAME AROUND UNTIL THEY'RE 90, JUST TO ASSERT THEIR EGO? I DON'T..."

David Bowie was 30 this year. It's significant, he thinks, that he feels no resentment now of the passing of time: in his early twenties, he reflects, the very thought of growing older appalled him – "it was an horrendous thought." Now he accepts with equanimity the responsibilities of maturity, and even the eventuality of death.

"Having a son made an enormous difference to me," he remarks. "At first it frightened me, and I tried not to consider the implications. Now it's his future that concerns me. My own future slips by. I'm prepared for its end.

"There are still so many people on an immortality kick, though, and it amuses me now. We'll do anything in our power to stay alive. There's a feeling that the average life span should be longer than it is. I disagree. I mean, we've never lived so long. Not in any century that man's been on this planet.

"Not so very long ago, no-one lived past the age of 40. And we're still not happy with 70. What are we after, exactly? There's just too much ego involved. And who wants to drag their old decaying frame around until they're 90, just to assert their ego? I don't, certainly."

In this context of age and the process of change I inevitably mention the minions of the new wave presently battering at the doors of success and achieving now the kind of publicity that Bowie enjoyed five years ago.

"The sad thing about it all," he says, "is that it's being called a movement. I wish the people involved were being treated as individuals. I'm so worried for them. I'm dissatisfied with them because I can't tolerate people who either want to form, or be part of, movements.

"It should always come back to individuals. I think there are now some individuals who have some very exciting ideas. Some of them at least. I only hope they survive. Because I totally sympathise with their indignation."

It is suggested (as the hounds bark at the door in an attempt to bring to a conclusion this brief interview), that both *Low* and *"Heroes"* betray an extraordinary pessimism, and there is, in the jagged atmosphere of the music they contain, an anticipation of violence and imminent disaster.

"I'm afraid I am pessimistic," Bowie offers. "I'm not at all optimistic about the future. But I'm not totally resigned to the situation. There is, I hope, some relief in compassion – and I know that's not a word usually flung at my work – and *"Heroes"* is, I hope, compassionate.

"Compassionate for people and the silly desperate situations they've got themselves into. That we've all got ourselves into, generally by ignorance and rash decisions. Decisions to join or remain within sets of people.

"We haven't moved on at all from that tribal thing – you know, if you don't understand it, have a swing at it with an axe.

"You know, people simply can't cope with the rate of change in this world. It's all far too fast. Since the Industrial Revolution there's been an upward spiral with people desperately trying to hang on, and now everybody's started to fall off. And it'll get worse.

"There isn't really much cause for hope," says David Bowie finally. "But I haven't given in yet. I think there's some fight left in me still. Somewhere. I'm not a brave man and I do see it all as a vast enormous joke. A very bad joke at that. But there is one area of optimism.

"Even bothering to write about it all and think about it is some kind of fight against it. But even so, I can't help thinking that it's all nearly over."

He turns his eyes towards heaven.

"Just give us a date, will you?" he asks.

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"BERLIN? I CAN'T EXPRESS THE FEELING OF FREEDOM I FELT THERE"

"My complete being is within those three albums." ROB HUGHES and STEPHEN DALTON uncover the complete story of Bowie's life-saving escape to Berlin. How he turned Iggy Pop into a health freak, embraced Brian Eno's "oblique strategies", documented Tony Visconti's indiscretions, and made a fearless and remarkable trilogy...

TAKEN FROM
UNCUT
APRIL/2001

BERLIN, 1976. STRUNG out and fiercely paranoid, David Bowie is convinced he has been royally screwed by a coke supplier over a deal. Cruising the city's main drag, the Kurfürstendamm, in the rusty old open-topped Mercedes bought for him by faithful sidekicks Iggy "Jimmy" Pop and Corinne "Coco" Schwab, he spots the dealer in his car. Seething and possessed, Bowie rams his prey's car mercilessly. Then he rams it again. And again. Then again and again and again.

"He looked around every second and I could see he was mortally terrified for his life," Bowie would recall to a theatre audience assembled for his *Bowie At The Beeb* concert in 2000. "I rammed him for a good five to 10 minutes. Nobody stopped me. Nobody did anything."

Bowie finally comes to his senses and quits the crash scene before it gets ugly, but that same night he reaches "some kind of spiritual impasse". He finds himself in a hotel garage, his foot jammed on the gas, racing around in circles at lunatic speed. The frazzled star decides "This is so Kirk Douglas in that film where he lets go of the steering wheel." So then, of course, he lets go of the wheel. But just as he does, the Mercedes runs out of petrol and splutters to a standstill. "Oh God," Bowie sobs, "This is the story of my life!"

But he's wrong. Because instead of running on empty, Bowie will now write a harrowing confessional called "Always Crashing In The Same Car". And instead of dying at his peak, he will pick up the shattered pieces of his mind and distil them into the three most cathartic, challenging, influential, and plain magical albums of his career. And instead of becoming just another '70s rock casualty, Bowie will fuse punk with electronica, black magic with white noise, amphetamine psychosis with spiritual healing. And, as a by-product of this process, he will accidentally invent the future of rock.

But just now, slumped over his steering wheel in a Berlin car park, Bowie is at the lowest point of a very bleak period. "As it happens," he will later confess with gallows humour, "Things picked up after that."

Did they ever.

Bowie's headlong rush into Trans Europe Excess actually began in Hollywood in the early part of 1975. Residing at North Doheny Drive in Bel Air, after a disastrous move from New York, the artist formerly known as David Jones began a crazed downward spiral into rock'n'roll damnation. Amid the detritus of an ugly split with management company MainMan, the gradual dissolution of his marriage and mushrooming hordes of pushers and hangers-on, an increasingly fragile Bowie started to implode.

Fuelled by lack of sleep and a raging appetite for what wife Angie described as "fat packages of best Peruvian flake", Bowie became obsessed with the Kaballah and magick. Snowblinded by cocaine, he convinced himself that two female fans wanted his sperm for impregnation on the Witches' Sabbath, thus bringing the spawn of Satan into the world. He later explained, "There was something horrible permeating the air in LA in those days. The stench of Manson and the Sharon Tate murders . . . "

His days were spent scrawling huge pentagrams on the walls, storing his urine in the fridge to protect him from spells, sculpting vast monoliths in front of the TV, and looking for coded messages in Rolling Stones album sleeves. Most terrifying of all was the exorcism of his swimming pool, the waters churning and boiling until an image of the devil was seared into the bottom of the pool. "I drew gateways into different dimensions," Bowie has said, "and I'm quite sure that, for myself, I really walked into other worlds and saw what was on the other side."

Besides cocaine, the exiled star lived on a diet of peppers and milk, the curtains closed as he "didn't want the sun spoiling the vibe of eternal now". A walking skeleton, he was spoon-fed ice-cream just to maintain his weight. David Bowie was alive, but only just, and very unwell.

"I blew my nose one day and CONTINUES OVER»

ANDREW KENT

Bowie meets the gentlemen of the press, Berlin, 1976 – with *MM*'s Chris Charlesworth (seated, second left)

half my brains came out," he would later recount.

John Lennon and Elton John visited and became convinced that Bowie was close to death. He told friends his phone was bugged and he was being tailed. At the Grammies, Aretha Franklin refused to shake his hand, quipping, "I'm so happy, I could even kiss David Bowie," as she accepted her award. Even during the subsequent LA sessions for *Station To Station*, Bowie burned black candles to dispel "unwanted visitors" who'd come over from the other side. To make matters worse, he was falling out bitterly with his latest manager, Michael Lippman, after just a few months.

The grim irony of it all was that Bowie was now enjoying huge success in a land that had proved naggingly elusive for most Brit-rockers to crack. *Young Americans* had been huge, spawning a US No 1 single in "Fame". His vampiric visage was plastered across every entertainment weekly, and he became one of the first white artists ever to appear on ABC's prestigious *Soul Train*. He was also about to make his fêted acting debut in Nic Roeg's surreal sci-fi flick, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*. *Station To Station* would be another smash, eventually hitting No 3 in the US. But by then, Bowie would be long gone and past caring.

Bowie was so addled during the *Station To Station* sessions in late '75, he barely remembers them: "I know it was in LA because I've read it was," he said recently. But it was on this LP that he began to create the brave new world that would lead him to Berlin and, eventually, to sanity. Homesick and bored with the MOR "plastic soul" of his *Young Americans* phase, Bowie became spellbound with the Teutonic electronica of Kraftwerk and Neu!.

"It's not the side-effects of the cocaine," Bowie growled on *Station To Station*'s title track. Though still infused with US R'n'B, this shuddering rock juggernaut explicitly signposted his new direction: *"The European canon is here,"* he shrieked over steam-driven, Krautrock-leaning machine rhythms. But any sonic similarities with Kraftwerk's 1977 classic *Trans-Europe Express* were coincidental. "*Station To Station* preceded *Trans-Europe Express* by quite some time," says Bowie, speaking exclusively to *Uncut* in January 2001, arguing that his synthetic fusion of R'n'B and electronica was poles apart from Kraftwerk's ordered machine symphonies. But he does salute Kraftwerk's "determination to stand apart from stereotypical American chord sequences and their wholehearted embrace of a European sensibility displayed through their music."

Bowie certainly demonstrated his fondness for Kraftwerk on his White Light [*Isolar*] tour in 1976, using tapes of their music to set the pre-show mood. Iggy Pop was a permanent fixture on the tour, having discharged himself from UCLA's Neuro Psychological Institute and had made a pact with Bowie to kick drugs. They were chemical brothers, overdosing on America, rushing headlong into Europe's embrace. Ironically, both would be arrested on the tour's East Coast leg for possession of cannabis. "Rest assured the stuff was not mine," Bowie snapped a few months later. "I can't say much more, but it did belong to others in the room that we were busted in. Bloody potheads. What a dreadful irony, me popped for grass. The stuff sickens me. I haven't touched it in a decade."

Ditching the intricately staged theatrics of previous stage shows, the White Light tour was a Euro-fixated extravaganza, with Bowie steeped in banks of white light, offset with harsh black backdrops. Inspired by German Expressionist cinema, Brechtian theatre and the photography of Man Ray, these live shows cast Bowie as his last and cruellest "character" – The Thin White Duke. Uniformed in pleated black pants, waistcoat and white shirt, fire-blonde hair scraped back, Bowie calls the Duke "a very Aryan, fascist type – a would-be romantic with absolutely no emotion."

The description proved chillingly apt, as Bowie's obsession with occultism and Germanic culture had evolved into an unhealthy fascination with The Third Reich, Arthurian Grail mythology, and Hitler himself. He gave unguarded interviews warning of a fascist backlash and sneering

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Always crashing in his own car! In '71, Bowie was hit by "Rupert The Riley" – his 1932 Riley 9 Gamecock roadster – leaving him with cracked knees and a scar on his right thigh. While recovering at Lewisham hospital, Bowie appeared on the in-house radio service, interviewed by hospital DJ Chris Warbis.

that "people aren't very bright, you know. They say they want freedom, but when they get the chance, they pass up Nietzsche and choose Hitler, because he'd march into a room to speak, and music and lights would come on at strategic moments. It was rather like a rock'n'roll concert."

While the British press fiercely debated Bowie's fascist fixation, the White Light tour rumbled on towards Europe. Bowie emptied his Hollywood house during a three-night residency in LA, packing the contents off to the Clos des Mésanges, the new home that his wife Angie had found in Blonay, Switzerland. The backstage guests in LA included Christopher Isherwood – the original Berlin-exiled Brit whose writings inspired the film *Cabaret*. At the same shows, Bowie dropped hints about his future direction: "I quite like Eno. I'd like him to be in Iggy's band. How gauche. No, actually, I'm getting Iggy an all-black band of ex-basketball players... "

In April, the White Light tour enjoyed an extended layover in Berlin. Bowie and Iggy were smitten, sampling the city's clubs and transvestite bars. Tour photographer Andrew Kent [*some of whose pictures are used for this feature*] recalls, "We went through Checkpoint Charlie and drove around East Berlin in David's limo. It was the President of Sierra Leone's old Mercedes 600 and it had one of those windows where you could stand and wave to the crowd. He had a great driver, Tony Mascia, and we went out at night and drove real fast. David and Iggy loved it, they were out all the time."

Following the Zurich show on April 17, with a week before the tour resumed, train tickets were arranged to take Bowie, his longtime PA Coco Schwab, Iggy, Andrew Kent and a handful of others up to Helsinki via Warsaw and Moscow. It was an eventful trip.

In Brest, on the Polish-Russian border, they were detained while books on Goebbels and Albert Speer were seized. Bowie claimed they were "research" materials for a film he was planning about Hitler's propaganda minister.

"Oh man, we didn't know what was going to happen," recalls Kent. "The train stops and an albino KGB man comes in! He takes us off the train, we go into this huge Russian inspection place and an interpreter comes up and says, 'We weren't expecting you.' We were all separated. Iggy and David got strip-searched. I think they took some books away, that was all. I don't know what they took from David, but they took a *Playboy* away from me."

Further complications lay ahead. "They said they'd have somebody to meet us in Moscow," says Kent, who organised tickets and transit visas. "There was nobody there. So when we got off the train we hired a military truck to take us to the Metropole hotel. We went to Red Square and the GUM department store, then back to the Metropole for caviar, then we met the next train in a different train station and left. We were in Moscow for seven hours, that's where all those pictures came from. And then in Helsinki they though we were lost, as the train schedules were wrong. There were headlines saying we were lost in Russia."

As reports of this incident filtered back to Britain, plus further inflammatory comments about Hitler from a Swedish press conference, concern about Bowie's political leanings shook the UK music press. It was in this incendiary climate that Bowie finally arrived on home soil at Victoria Station in his open-topped Mercedes in May 1976. Here the notorious "heil and farewell" incident took place, a stiff-armed wave that no-one present took to be a Nazi salute. Only in subsequent press reports did Bowie's gesture turn sinister. "That did not happen," Bowie later fumed. "I just waved. Believe me. On the life of my child, I waved. And the bastard caught me. In mid-wave, man . . . as if I'd be foolish enough to pull a stunt like that. I died when I saw the photo."

According to one biographer, however, Bowie threw a genuine Nazi salute in Berlin for photographer Andrew Kent on the promise that the picture would never be made public. "I don't want to talk about it," says Kent. "I never felt David was a Nazi sympathiser. I'm Jewish, so if anybody would be sensitive to that and have bad feelings . . . I just think it was what I'd call an adolescent attraction."

Whether or not he struck the pose, Bowie's interest in fascism was clearly never a serious flirtation. He's spent 25 years explaining and apologising for the "glib theatrical observations" he made in '75 and '76. His band at the time, mostly black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, never took the comments seriously. Eno now dismisses them as pure posturing. Only the boneheads of the NF, who praised Bowie's "Aryan" sound in their literature, and the equally dim FBI, who reportedly listed Bowie as an "apparent Nazi sympathiser", could miss the illogical irony of his public statements.

"DAVID GETS INTO A PECULIAR STATE WHEN HE'S WORKING... HE DOESN'T EAT. A RAW EGG WAS HIS FOOD FOR THE DAY" BRIAN ENO

What is clear is that Bowie's mental state was wracked and ravaged in the mid-'70s. Before the White Light shows at Wembley in May, he protested to Fleet Street journalist Jean Rook that The Thin White Duke was not so much a rock'n'roll Hitler as "pure clown . . . the eternal clown putting over the great sadness of 1976." Rook noted that Bowie "looks terribly ill. Thin as a stick insect. And corpse pale, as if his lifeblood had all run up into his flaming hair."

Brian Eno attended one of the Wembley shows, returning to Bowie's rented digs in Maida Vale to discuss a serious collaboration. Bowie then moved on to finish the tour in Holland and France, finally returning to Switzerland for his son Joe's birthday party.

In the spring of 1976, Bowie stood at a crossroads. He could have returned to the US, where his commercial stock was high, and become a pampered mediocrity like Rod Stewart. Alas, that would have meant returning to LA, "The most repulsive wart on the backside of humanity... the fucking place should be wiped off the face of the Earth," as he told *Melody Maker* in 1977. Alternatively, he could have settled into taxpayer-friendly domesticity in Switzerland, played happy families and become Phil Collins. Nice.

But Bowie also had another option: to rent a faceless apartment in "the most arduous city I could think of", a magnet for druggy drop-outs and draft dodgers, a hub of bohemian decadence, an island of surrealism in a country that was never supposed to exist, hemmed in by barbed wire and Cold War power politics. Plus, incidentally, the heroin capital of Europe.

Before he even had time to yodel across the placid waters of Lake Geneva, Bowie was packing his bags.

Berlin offered Bowie sanctuary from the pressures of superstardom, marital and managerial turmoil, but perhaps most of all, from himself. Or at least the grotesque caricature of a coked-up, mentally scrambled rock star that he'd become in LA. "Life in LA had left me with an overwhelming sense of foreboding," he tells *Uncut*. "I had approached the brink of drug-induced calamity one too many times and it was essential to take positive action. Berlin was one of the few cities where I could move around in virtual anonymity. I was going broke, it was cheap to live. For some reason, Berliners just didn't care. Well, not about an English rock singer..."

Although he visited several Nazi sites in Berlin, Bowie later admitted that his academic interest in Hitler suffered a fatal dose of reality after moving to Germany. "Suddenly I was in a situation where I was meeting young people of my age whose fathers had been SS men. That was a good way to be woken up out of that particular dilemma, and start to re-function in a more orderly fashion . . . I came crashing down to earth when I got back to Europe."

Bowie was not alone in Berlin. Coco Schwab remained by his side, Iggy came along for the ride, and new friends like Tangerine Dream's Edgar Froese helped ease all three into the city's social scene. Iggy later raved about Berlin's relaxed attitude towards "cult behaviour" in his fragmented autobiography, *I Need More*. "It was like a fairyland," he gushed, "a whole deserted city . . . and it's such an alcoholic city. Someone is always swaying down the street. They also don't really care about drug traffic – or rather, they don't care about people having fun."

Fun was certainly on the cards when Dave'n'Ig's big adventure first kicked off in Berlin. Although both were resolved to kick drugs, cocaine was still a feature in the early days. Dutch-born transsexual CONTINUES OVER»

ANDREW KENT

Romy Haag, who ran the Lutzower Lampe cabaret club and reportedly enjoyed a short-lived romance with Bowie, remembers Iggy and David stumbling into her bar "coked-up and wasted". British paratrooper Stuart Mackenzie, who was briefly Bowie's informal bodyguard in Berlin, later witnessed Iggy snorting coke from a vase while David would "booze, booze, booze" until he threw up or collapsed.

But these were early days, with the madness of LA still receding. Bowie's new get-clean regime also involved painting and visiting museums. Berlin for him was the home of Fritz Lang and Bertholt Brecht, plus the "angst-ridden" Expressionist painting school Die Brucke, which would later inspire album sleeves for both Bowie (*Low* and *"Heroes"*) and Iggy (*The Idiot* and *Lust For Life*). "Berlin was the first time in years that I had felt a joy of life," David says, "and a great feeling of release and healing. It's a city eight times bigger than Paris, remember, and so easy to 'get lost' in and to 'find' oneself, too."

Bowie and Iggy haunted the gay bars, beer houses and discothèques of Berlin, downing the local König-Pilsener brew in heroic quantities. One night, Iggy went to a punk club where a model of the Berlin Wall was prophetically smashed to pieces. On another boozy occasion, he stumbled onstage to deliver half an hour of Sinatra songs before a bewildered cabaret crowd hauled him off.

"I was drunk as hell," Iggy later admitted.

New music was never far away either.

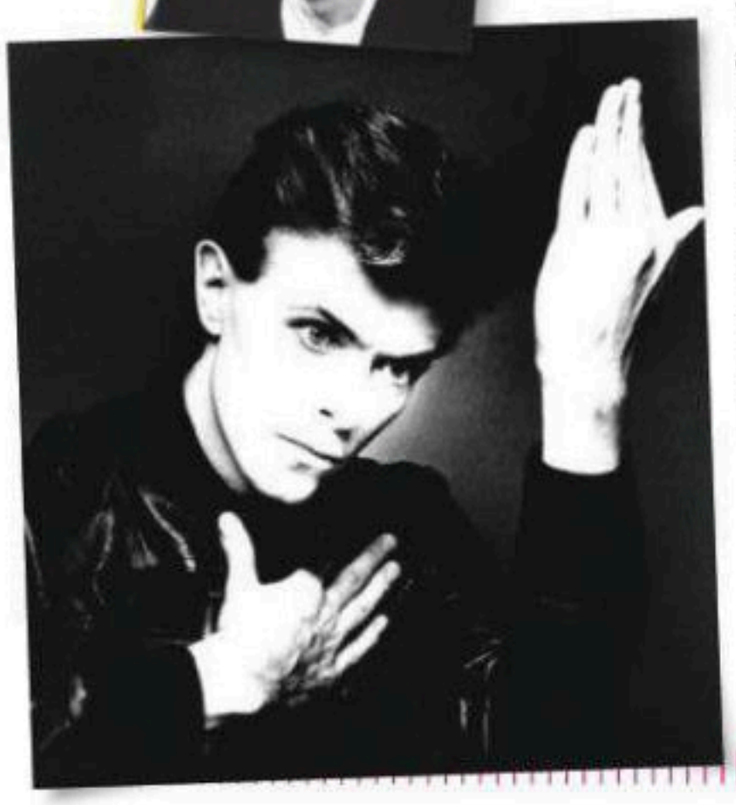
"Germany was not a musical backwater," Bowie insists. "Apart from the local regeneration, every so-called cutting-edge act came through Berlin. Remember, Berlin was the 'home' of cool and black clothes. Art bands dreamt of playing Berlin."

After an initial spell at the Hotel Gehrus, Bowie and Coco found an apartment in the late summer of 1976 in the elegant, bohemian district of Schöneberg, once home to Christopher Isherwood. Though modest by rock-star standards, this dark, wood-panelled hideaway in a faceless tenement block was in fact a seven-room mansion flat with an office, a studio, plus bedrooms for Coco and Iggy. Bowie slept under one of his giant neo-Expressionist paintings of controversial Japanese author Yukio Mishima.

"155 Hauptstrasse, second floor," Bowie recalls to *Uncut*. "Knock hard because the bell sometimes doesn't work. Ig eventually moved in with a bird next door." Iggy's girlfriend was diplomat's daughter Esther Friedmann. Often they'd blast off in Esther's Volkswagen into the flat, wooded lakeland around Berlin. Iggy loved the "rinky-dink villages full of strange old German people. We used to get lost. I like to go out and get lost and be in places made of wood, just to wash every shred of America off. Taking a walk was like taking a shower."

Bowie enthuses about the growing sense of well-being which Berlin brought. "Some days the three of us would jump into the car and drive like crazy through East Germany and head down to the Black Forest, stopping off at any village that caught our eye. Just go for days at a time. Or we'd take all-afternoon lunches at the Wannsee on winter days. The place had a glass roof and was surrounded by trees and still exuded an atmosphere of the long-gone Berlin of the '20s."

Bowie, Iggy and Coco shopped for caviar and chocolates at the Ka De We department store in West Berlin. At night, David says, they'd "hang with the intellectuals and beats at the Exile restaurant in Kreuzberg. In the back they had this smoky room with a billiard table, sort of like another living room, except the company was always changing."



Berlin's isolation behind the Iron Curtain also lent the city a chilly frisson of Cold War gloom. Ricky Gardiner, the Edinburgh-born guitarist who played on *Low* and *Lust For Life*, recalls driving towards this Oz-like oasis along the fiercely guarded motorway corridor through East Germany. "The autobahn was just as Hitler had built it," he says. "It had not had any repairs. The broken concrete slabs had taken on a tectonic plate-like life of their own and we bounced from slab to slab. The autobahn was occasionally crossed by overhead walkways. Here, small groups of people would gather to watch the affluent West exercising freedom they could only dream about. Their dress was drab and colourless. They had the demeanour of inmates of some restrictive institution."

Tony Visconti, who co-produced all three of Bowie's Berlin albums, remembers the city as a psychotic theme park. "The impending danger of the divided military zones, the bizarre nightlife, the extremely traditional restaurants with aproned servers, reminders of Hitler's not-too-distant presence, a studio 500 yards from the Wall," he says. "You could've been on the set of *The Prisoner*."

Bowie called Berlin his "clinic", a therapeutic experiment in chemical and spiritual detox. He grew a moustache, got a crew cut from Visconti, took to dressing like a Polish peasant and cycling around the city unrecognised. This, he explained, was the perfect antidote to "that dull greeny-grey limelight of American rock'n'roll and its repercussions – pulling myself out of it and getting to Europe and saying: 'For God's sake re-evaluate why you wanted to get into this in the first place. Did you really do it just to clown around in LA? Retire. What you need is to look at yourself more accurately. Find some people you don't understand and a place you don't want to be and just put yourself into it. Force yourself to buy your own groceries . . .'"

But Berlin was also a grand metaphor for Bowie's towering sense of alienation and schizophrenia in the late '70s, a vast canvas for the healing psychodrama of *Low*, *"Heroes"* and *Lodger*. Stranded in a bleak interzone between East and West, this fractured cityscape may well have appealed to Bowie's lifelong love of sci-fi. But it was also to become the setting for his most adventurous voyage yet. A descent into his own cracked psyche, an exploration of inner space.

IGGY AND BOWIE WERE CHEMICAL BROTHERS, OVER-DOSING ON AMERICA, RUSHING INTO EUROPE'S EMBRACE

Part One of Bowie and Iggy's musical rehab was Pop's *The Idiot*. Recording began in June at the Château d'Herouville near Paris, soon after the White Light tour ended, with many of the same backing musicians. The duo then briefly relocated to Munich's Musicland studios, where they met future Bowie collaborator Giorgio Moroder. Finally, the wandering duo settled in Hansa in Berlin.

Iggy trailed *The Idiot* as a "cross between James Brown and Kraftwerk", with Bowie producing and playing "Angry Young Guitar". Featuring brutalist robo-punk workouts like "Nightclubbing", "Funtime" and the rough blueprint for future Bowie 45 "China Girl", the LP was a bruising collision of disco and rock, Europe and America. Eno described listening to *The Idiot* as "like having your head encased in concrete". He meant it as a compliment.

The Idiot was also a dry run for the radical new sounds on Bowie's *Low*, which would turn out less abrasive but no less emotionally intense. Initially christened 'New Music Night And Day', the LP was renamed to convey the visual pun of its sleeve shot from *The Man Who Fell To Earth* of Bowie in profile: low profile. Despite being enshrined in rock history as the first of Bowie's "triptych" of Berlin albums with Eno, *Low* was almost entirely cut in France, at Château d'Herouville. An opulent mansion hemmed in by high walls and heavy gates, the Château had hosted Bowie's *Pinups* sessions three years earlier, in happier times.

The musicians on *Low* were mostly *Station*

Trans Europe Excess: Bowie and Iggy Pop in Red Square, Moscow

To Station and White Light tour veterans – guitarist Carlos Alomar, bass player George Murray, drummer Dennis Davis, and Tony Visconti co-producing with Bowie. Iggy was another fixture at the Château, singing occasional backing vocals and sounding out Gardiner for his own future projects. But the most significant new team member was Eno, who arrived midway through the sessions with subversive strategies and a primitive, joystick-operated synthesiser. Visconti's then-wife, singer Mary Hopkin, duetted with Eno on the background sighs to "Sound And Vision", jokily credited to "Peter and Paul".

Former Beggars Opera guitarist Ricky Gardiner was also recruited on Visconti's recommendation. "He was totally left-field and savvy with special effects," says Visconti. "I was in awe of him." But Bowie reveals he had other plans for the sessions. "The original top of my wish list for a guitar player on *Low* was Michael Rother from Neu!," Bowie says. "Neu! being passionate, even diametrically opposite to Kraftwerk. I phoned Dinger from France in the first few days of recording, but in the most polite and diplomatic fashion he said no."

Despite its incongruous genesis in rural Gallic splendour, *Low* was emphatically a Berlin album in spirit: a sonic distillation of the city whose isolated state chimed in with Bowie's ravaged brain in 1976. "That initial period of living in Berlin produced *Low*," Bowie revealed in 1977. "It was like, 'Isn't it great being on your own? Let's just pull down the blinds and fuck 'em all. Berlin has the strange ability to make you write only the important things. Anything else, you don't mention – and in the end you produce *Low*."

The chillingly beautiful instrumental pieces on the album paid explicit homage to Bowie's new bunker in the East. "Warszawa" caught the bleak mystery of Cold War Poland, but it takes no great leap of faith to draw parallels between the album's melancholic tone poems and Bowie's own deep-frozen mental state.

Besides the looming shadow of Berlin and the aftershocks of cocaine psychosis, Bowie brought a more immediate set of troubles to the *Low* sessions. Bitter divorce proceedings with Angie, a looming custody battle over their son Joe, and ongoing wrangles with ex-manager Michael Lippman kept dragging him away to legal hearings in Paris. Angie even dropped by the studio with her new boyfriend, sparking a huge row with David. "They had a punch-up and started throwing bottles around," Visconti later revealed. "David was going through a difficult period professionally and personally. To his credit, he didn't put on a brave face."

Brian Eno recently told *Uncut* that, while making *Low*, Bowie "was pretty much living at the edge of his nervous system . . . he was very, very upset. I felt desperately sorry for him going through that and trying to make a record. But as often happens, that translated into a sense of complete abandon in the work."

Bowie now admits that "it was a dangerous period for me. I was at the end of my tether, physically and emotionally, and had serious doubts about my sanity. But this was in France. Overall, I get a sense of real optimism through the veils of despair from *Low*. I can hear myself struggling to get well."

Low is awash with anguish and despair, but catharsis, too. Some of its robotic, jerky vocal tracks contain the most emotionally naked lyrics of Bowie's career, while the opiated disco-pop diamond "Sound And Vision" offers a sublime hymn to numb withdrawal: David later called it "an ultimate retreat song… I was going through dreadful times, wanting to be put in a little cold room with omnipotent blue on the walls and blinds on the windows." Meanwhile, the traumatised funk of "Breaking Glass" contains a blood-chilling flashback to Bowie's spirit-conjuring rituals in Hollywood: *"Don't look at the carpet/I drew something awful on it…"*

Speaking of spirits, the *Low* sessions also suffered from supernatural visitations. Château d'Herouville contains two studios linked by a covered arcade, each named after former residents Frederic Chopin and George Sand. The ghosts of these doomed lovers are rumoured to patrol its rambling corridors. In fact, Bowie declined to sleep in the master bedroom because it seemed to CONTINUES OVER»

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Bowie's German language version of "Heroes", "Helden" was recorded in Berlin in 1977 and turned up on the soundtrack of *Christiane F.* in 1981. He'd recorded in German before, though, cutting versions of "When I Live My Dream", "Love You Till Tuesday" and "Let Me Sleep Beside You" in 1969.

GETTY, LFI

Bowie and Bolan duet on the final episode of Granada TV show *Marc*, September 7, 1977. Nine days later, Bolan was dead

be haunted. "It was a spooky place," Bowie told us. "I did refuse one bedroom, as it felt impossibly cold in certain areas."

Tony Visconti agrees. "There was certainly some strange energy in that château," he explains. "The master bedroom had a very dark corner, next to the window, ironically, that seemed to just suck light into it. It felt like it was haunted as all fuck. Eno claimed he was awakened every morning with someone shaking his shoulder. When he opened his eyes, no-one was there."

Most of the band went home after completing their parts in just five days. Bowie, Eno, Visconti and Gardiner stayed on at the Château to add vocals, textures and overdubs. Rumours that alternative lyrics were recorded on some songs are denied by Bowie. But Visconti remembers, "David wrote a third verse to 'Always Crashing In The Same Car' and sang it in the style of Bob Dylan. It was done half in jest, but we were a little freaked as Dylan had been in that motorcycle accident and this seemed like bad taste, I guess. David asked me to erase it and I did."

Eno's contribution to *Low* is sometimes overstated. After all, instrumental tracks such as "Speed Of Life" and "A New Career In A New Town" use a muscular R'n'B backing, light years removed from Eno's ambient blueprint for discreet, abstract background sound. A late arrival to the sessions, he shares few writing credits and, contrary to folklore, was not a producer. "My name is printed in the credits as co-producer with David on all the sleeves," says an exasperated Visconti. "I don't recall Brian ever setting the record straight."

However, Eno's streak of avant-garde anarchy was undeniably crucial to Bowie's creative breakthrough on *Low*. It was Eno who suggested keeping demo versions rather than re-recording them: "Why fix it? It isn't broken." Pushing for a more "nervy and electronic" mood, he introduced radical new methods – including the notorious Oblique Strategies cards he devised with artist Peter Schmidt which contained such random instructions as "Honour your error as a hidden intention", "Use unqualified people", and so on.

Eno programmed the vintage machines on *Low* with quaintly Victorian names: Chamberlin, Rimmer, Tape Horn. He also worked up rough versions of "Subterraneans" and "Warszawa" without Bowie, the latter melody inspired by Visconti's four-year-old son Morgan plonking three notes on the studio piano. The ambient Zen master reasoned that he could always pay for the studio time and use the tapes elsewhere if David disliked the results.

As it happened, Bowie embraced Brian Eno's deconstructivist methods and took them to another level. He added vocals to "Warszawa" in an invented tongue based on recordings of a Balkan boys' choir, which Visconti treated with a pitch-warping machine called an Eventide Harmonizer that "fucks with the fabric of time". Rather like the dry, squashed wallop of the gated snare drum which Visconti pioneered on *Low*, this sound would later come to dominate '80s stadium rock.

For such an experimental album, *Low* did indeed have a deep impact. It was credited with helping to inspire several generations of synth-pop bands in the late '70s and early '80s, from Gary Numan to Ultravox to Human League. Joy Division reportedly borrowed their early name, Warsaw, from the track "Warszawa". Later, as New Order, they made an unsuccessful attempt to record using Eno's Oblique Strategies method.

But the superficially futurist sheen of *Low* has been worn away by history and its instrumental pieces now sound like pure emotion, as timeless as Gregorian chants, as

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

"The Hall by the Wall..." Other notable artists to record at Das Hansa Tonstudio in Berlin include Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds, Boney M, Killing Joke, Siouxsie And The Banshees, Marillion, Milli Vanilli, U2, REM, Snow Patrol, Supergrass and KT Tunstall. The Cure also demoed "Killing An Arab" there.

"Par-a-pa-pa-pom..." Bowie and Bing on *Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas*. The show was recorded on September 11, '77, one month before Bing's death

transcendent as religiously inspired neo-classical masters Arvo Pärt or Henryk Gorecki. Bowie would later talk of the album's "pure spirituality". In the '90s, glacial minimalist Philip Glass adapted three *Low* tracks into a symphony, followed by works based in the other two Berlin albums.

At the time, however, *Low* proved too far out for Bowie's record company. After returning to Berlin's Hansa studios to finish mixing and vocals, David delivered the album tapes to his panic-stricken label in London. Aghast at this chilly new direction, RCA dropped the LP from the Christmas release schedules. One executive reportedly suggested buying the star a house in Philadelphia in return for supplying another warm, commercial, disco-soul smash in the vein of *Young Americans*. All to no avail.

Contractual wrangles aside, the demons surrounding Bowie in '76 were still not wholly exorcised by *Low*. In November, he had another dramatic confrontation with Angie in Berlin. She considered it their "one last chance at reconciliation", but it ended with David collapsing from chest pains and being rushed to the British Army clinic. Later diagnosed as an anxiety attack, possibly caused by excessive drinking, this showdown was effectively the last straw for David and Angela's marriage. Incensed by Coco Schwab's influence over Bowie, Angie's final act of defiance followed soon after. She returned to the Schöneberg flat and took revenge on her absent rival. "I went into Coco's room," Angie later wrote, "gathered up her clothes and some of the gifts I'd given her in better times, threw them out of the window, called a cab and caught a flight to London."

"BERLIN HAS THE STRANGE ABILITY TO MAKE YOU WRITE ONLY THE IMPORTANT THINGS..."
DAVID BOWIE

Low was finally released in January '77, followed by the incongruously jaunty hit "Sound And Vision" in February. Scoring an effortless No 2 on the UK charts and an impressive No 11 in America, the album defied both Bowie's doubters at RCA and his sternest press critics, many of whom damned *Low* as an almost personal betrayal. The polarised press reaction to *Low* was most strikingly embodied by *NME*, where a rare double-header review by Ian MacDonald and longtime Bowie champion Charles Shaar Murray took diametrically opposite positions. MacDonald called the record "stunningly beautiful... the sound of Sinatra reproduced by Martian computers with no access to the English language." Conversely, Murray poured scorn on "an album so negative that it doesn't even contain emptiness or the void... *Low* is the sound of nothing, and even the nothing is elusive... a state of mind beyond desperation... it stinks of artfully counterfeited spiritual defeat..."

Significantly, *Low* also arrived at the height of punk. Bowie denies any subliminal connection between his bleak Berlin period and the anti-star, alienated, apocalyptic mood of rock's new revolutionaries. "You've just described my frame of mind in 1976," he quips. As Jon Savage wrote in *England's Dreaming*, both *Low* and *"Heroes"* had a "huge impact" during punk: "For every person who saw the necessity of getting into the world, of becoming politically active and thus translating the original commitment of punk into a fierce, organised protest campaign, there was another who wanted to get out of this world: to disengage, to sort out the turmoil within their own heads..."

While punk swept the rock world, Bowie was one of the few '70s titans to maintain his credibility. "Whether it was my befuddled brain or because of the lack of impact of the English variety of punk in the US, the whole movement was virtually over by the time it lodged itself in my awareness," he says. "The few punk bands I saw in Berlin struck me as being sort of post-'69 Iggy and it seemed like he'd already done that. Though I regret not being around for the whole Pistols circus as that kind of entertainment would have done more for my depressed disposition than just about anything else I could think of."

Bowie's association with Iggy probably helped protect his reputation during the Stalinist purges of punk. His savvy decision to play keyboards for Iggy on The Idiot tour in early '77 only underlined this dressed-down, man-of-the-people Dave. After recruiting *Low* guitarist Ricky Gardiner and American rhythm section Hunt and Tony Sales, later of Tin Machine, tour rehearsals took place in a screening room at Berlin's legendary UFA film studios. "Fritz Lang worked there before the Nazis took over," Iggy explained. "They still had all these wonderful German Expressionist films just sitting in cans rotting, because they still can't figure out the politics of who should get them."

Beginning in Aylesbury on March 1, the British shows were greeted by what Iggy called "a frenzied hail of gob". Cementing his punk connections, Bowie and Iggy also met up with Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious in London. "John was quite in awe of Jim [Iggy]," recalls Bowie, "but Sid was near catatonic and I felt very bad for him. He was so young and in need of help."

As Sid succumbed to heroin, Iggy shunned it. Although he'd later relapse, Berlin had temporarily cleansed his system, turning him into a "health freak". The shot of a maniacally grinning Iggy that Andrew Kent took during a BBC interview, which later became the *Lust For Life* cover, caught Pop's new mood of energised optimism. Even so, Bowie later confessed that the tour was far from drug-free. "I kept wanting to leave the tour to keep off drugs," he said in 1993. "The drug use was unbelievable and I knew it was killing me, so that was the difficult side of it. But the playing was fun."

Bowie finally overcame his long-standing fear of flying to play US dates with Iggy. The first leg of the tour broke up in late April in LA, where Bowie apparently went on a night on the tiles with Mick Jagger. Then both he and Iggy returned to Berlin to work on Iggy's *Lust For Life*, recorded in a three-week frenzy at Hansa By The Wall studios. Iggy took a more dominant role than on *The Idiot* a year before: "The band and David would leave the studio to go to sleep," he later recalled, "but not me."

Bowie confirms Iggy's claims that the bruising, percussive, invincible title tune was written by him on a ukulele in front of the TV at his Schöneberg apartment, its stuttering rhythm inspired by the Morse-code beat of the Allied Forces Network theme. But its fellow future classic, "The Passenger", popped into the head of guitarist Ricky Gardiner during an idyllic spring walk. "David, Iggy and myself convened at David's flat in Berlin to pool ideas for Iggy's next album," says Gardiner. "David asked me if I had anything. I didn't realise they wanted material so I had nothing prepared. However, I remembered the chord sequence. I played it into Iggy's little cassette machine on my unplugged Strat. He returned the next day with the lyrics complete."

Iggy resumed touring without Bowie in late summer 1977. By June, David was back at Hansa to make what many consider to be his masterpiece: *"Heroes"*. Most of the *Low* players were recalled – Visconti, Alomar, Davis, Murray. Eno was once again musical catalyst and sonic prankster, providing "guitar treatments" and playing synth. But unlike *Low*, Eno was involved from the start and his experimental methods were now embraced with confidence and vigour.

Hansa's elegantly shabby Studio Two, a cavernous room that Bowie christened "The hall by The Wall", had seen service as a Nazi social club. "It was a Weimar ballroom," Bowie says, "utilised by Gestapo in the '30s for their own little musical 'soirées'..."

Just a stone's throw from the Eastern Zone, Hansa overlooked the concrete CONTINUES OVER»

REX FEATURES

curtain that split Berlin – and the world – in two. According to Visconti, the studio's location next to a watchtower staffed by gun-toting East German border guards lent the sessions an extra buzz. "Being so close to The Wall made it a pretty exotic place to make a record," he says. "It was a great moment in a special time. I heard U2 went to Hansa looking for what we'd created there and it didn't pan out for them. I heard they hated the place."

Swaggering and anthemic, *"Heroes"* sounds like *Low* on steroids. Numb introspection had evolved into swash-buckling dynamism. Bowie was largely drug-free by now, although by his own admission he was drinking heavily during his first year in Berlin – which perhaps explains the references to booze on *"Heroes"*. Bowie admits the album's edge of manic hysteria is not wholly free from the ghosts of *Low*. "It's louder and harder and played with more energy," he concedes. "But lyrically it seems far more psychotic. By now I was living full-time in Berlin so my own mood was good. Buoyant even. But those lyrics come from a nook in the unconscious. Still a lot of house cleaning going on, I feel."

Embracing everything from Wagnerian electronica to disco romanticism, the vocal tunes on *"Heroes"* crackle with lusty intensity, while the ambient sound-paintings bathe in Gothic shadows. The foundations for most tracks were laid down in days, prompting a normally painstaking Eno to remark, "Shit, it can't be this easy." Bowie favoured one or two takes, with rough and spontaneous edges left in the mix. Visconti recalls Bowie working "unbelievably fast", with songs like "Joe The Lion" virtually composed as he sang. "I'd put the headphones on, stand at the mic, listen to a verse, jot down key words that came to mind, then take," says Bowie. "Then I'd repeat the process for the next section. It was something I learnt from working with Iggy and, I thought, a very effective way of breaking normality in the lyric."

The symphonic suite of instrumentals which dominates the latter half of *"Heroes"* was also improvised in the studio, some tracks using Eno's Oblique Strategies cards. The hilariously grim sturm-und-drang piano piece "Sense Of Doubt" evolved this way, while others were assembled in what Eno calls a "completely arbitrary" manner. "Moss Garden", a luminous homage to Bowie's beloved Japan, began with Eno playing a chord sequence and telling Bowie "Give us a shout when you think it's long enough." After a few minutes, Bowie looked at the clock and said, "Yeah, that'll probably do." Bosh, bosh, bosh. And it took Radiohead three years to make *Kid A*. Go figure.

Only one song on *"Heroes"* was written before recording took place – the achingly romantic alienation ballad "Sons Of The Silent Age", with its allusions to pre-talkies cinema and ghostly urban dwellers who *"glide in and out of life"*. Most of Bowie's lyrics are quickfire collages or streams of consciousness, written on the hoof. The overblown refrain *"Someone fetch a priest!"* in "Beauty And The Beast", for example, is an in-joke adapted from Visconti's favourite studio exclamation: "Someone fuck a priest." And the shrill, nervous-breakdown screams of *"Get me to the doctor!"* in "Blackout" are not, Bowie insists, a dramatisation of his own collapse in late 1976, but a reference to power cuts. Either way, he seems to be milking the melodrama for high-camp humour.

> **"WHILE MAKING *LOW*, BOWIE WAS PRETTY MUCH LIVING AT THE EDGE OF HIS NERVOUS SYSTEM"**
> **BRIAN ENO**

Indeed, there's a rich seam of comedy within *"Heroes"*, often overlooked. A whiff of self-mockery clings to the alcoholic anti-heroes who populate these tunes, jet black though the joke may be. David later claimed that he and Eno spent the sessions "laughing and falling on the floor. I think out of all the time we spent recording, 40 minutes out of every hour were spent just crying with laughter." Eno recently told *Uncut* that he and Bowie communicated in Peter Cook and Dudley Moore voices throughout the sessions. "Bowie was Pete and I was Dud… It was hilarious, I don't think I've ever laughed so much making a record."

Bowie now recalls, "We certainly had our share of schoolboy giggling fits. I think 'most of the sessions' is a bit of an exaggeration. However, Brian and I did have Pete and Dud down pretty pat. Long dialogues about John Cage performing on a 'prepared layer' at the Bricklayer's Arms on the Old Kent Road and the like. Quite silly."

But the *"Heroes"* sessions also involved intense nocturnal marathons, including one which produced the album's darkest track, "Neuköln" – named after an inner-city area of Berlin where Turkish "guest workers" crowded into brutalist tenement blocks, literally up against The Wall. After these late shifts, Bowie and Eno would stumble back to the Schöneberg apartment, where Eno and his girlfriend were staying.

"He gets into a very peculiar state when he's working," Eno said of Bowie soon after completing *"Heroes"*. "He doesn't eat. It used to strike me as very paradoxical that two comparatively well-known people would be staggering home at 6am, and he'd break a raw egg into his mouth and that was his food for the day, virtually. It was slummy. We'd sit around the kitchen table tired and a bit fed up – me with a bowl of crummy German cereal, him with albumen running down his shirt."

Bowie adds, "Again, I must stress that this is a bit romantic. There was a café in the Hansa building, run by an ex-boxing champion – my painting *Champion Of The World* is a portrait of him. We'd either have a lunch and dinner there or order up. But the egg thing is also true. I was eating extremely well as my drug intake was practically zero. I'd eat a couple of raw eggs to start the day or finish it, with pretty big meals in between. Lots of meat and veg, thanks Mum. Brian would start his day with a cup of boiling water, into which he'd cut huge lumps of garlic. He was no fun to do backing vocals with on the same mic."

Another lightning-speed worker was guitarist Robert Fripp, a late addition to the alchemic brew of *"Heroes"*. The King Crimson vet had worked with Eno before (on '73's *No Pussyfooting*, and was summoned from New York at short notice when the Hansa sessions were deemed in need of fresh spark. Fripp stayed in Berlin for a single weekend, arriving late one night and immediately jamming along to half-finished tracks. According to Eno, Fripp recorded all his parts in six hours, straight off the plane. Eno plugged Fripp into his EMS briefcase synth and the guitarist plunged headlong into the album's fast-and-loose depths. "He'd start without even knowing the chord sequences," says Eno. "He'd just launch into them at full speed and somehow navigate his way through them."

Bowie's instructions to Fripp were minimal: "Play with total abandonment… play like Albert King… things like 'Joe The Lion' were him having a bash at the blues." The bristling "Frippatronic" guitar parts were mostly recorded in single takes, which Bowie and Visconti would later manipulate and edit into composite collages. "Before we knew it," says Visconti, "we had a sound no-one had ever heard before."

Fripp also contributed to the Pythonesque hysteria of the *"Heroes"* sessions. Visconti recalls, "He wondered if he was going to get laid in Berlin that night, and used the euphemism, 'I have hopes to wave the sword of union tonight.' He'd lay on his Dorset accent extra thick for that. We couldn't stop laughing." The next day, like The Lone Ranger, Fripp rode off into the sunset – back on a jet to New York. Mission accomplished.

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Mary Hopkin, of "Those Were The Days" fame, married Bowie's producer Tony Visconti in 1971. Mary appears, of course, on backing vocals on *Low* and *"Heroes"* According to Visconti, "Mary's 'doo-doo-doos' [on "Sound And Vision"] were recorded before anything else. Before title or melody. Lyrics were always last".

The monolithic title track to *"Heroes"* is both comic and serious, tender and tragic. Visconti used the bouncing reverb of Hansa to stunning effect, recording Bowie's vocal on a trio of mics in different locations – the second and third only activated above a certain volume level, producing a Spector-esque tidal wave which builds and builds to a level beyond hysteria. The tune's thumping, motorik rhythm was inspired by Lou Reed's "Waiting For The Man", but the true story

At L'Ange Bleu, Paris, for Bowie's 30th: (l-r) Iggy, Romy Haag, Bowie, Coco Schwab, Pat Gibbons

behind the lyric's semi-ironic hymn to doomed romance has long been debated by fans. Visconti has hinted that the lovers in "Heroes" were inspired by a "flirtatious kiss" between himself and backing singer Antonia Maass, which Bowie witnessed from the studio window. But in '77, Bowie claimed the characters were based on strangers who he spotted enjoying a secret lunchtime by The Berlin Wall. Visconti confirms to *Uncut* that his illicit involvement with Maass was the true genesis of "Heroes". "As I was married at the time, David protected me all these years by not saying he saw Antonia and me kiss. He asked to be left alone to write the lyrics and we took a walk by the wall. Antonia was a beautiful woman and a great singer. Our act of indiscretion certainly inspired that verse. Coco told me that."

"What a discreet dude I am," laughs Bowie today. But he also concedes the "subtext/backstory" to "Heroes" was deeply personal: "I'd got over the majority of my emotional decline, and felt like I was coming back to who I should have been . . . there was a certain healing going on… it's as much about me as it is about the protagonists in the song. 'We can get out of this, I'll be OK.'"

Bowie also clears up conflicting stories over the *"Heroes"* sleeve pose. Some claim it derives from a self-portrait by a Brücke Museum artist, Gramatté, while others insist it shares its inspiration with Iggy's *The Idiot* cover in Erich Heckel's portrait of a mad friend, Roquairol. "I couldn't stand [*expressionist painter*] Gramatté," he says today. "He was wishy-washy. I've seen the Gramatté, but no, it was Heckel. Heckel's *Roquairol*, and his print from around 1910, *Young Man*, were a major influence on me as a painter."

Visiting Britain for a promotional blitz in September 1977, Bowie reunited with former glam-rock buddy Marc Bolan to perform "Heroes" on Bolan's Granada TV show, *Marc*. More surreally, he also recorded "Heroes" for the yuletide special, *Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas*, then duetted with the crooner on "Peace On Earth/Little Drummer Boy" – released as an unlikely festive single five years later. In a macabre twist, both Bolan and Crosby would die within weeks of these meetings. After attending Bolan's funeral in north London, Bowie reportedly drove past his childhood homes in Brixton and Beckenham.

With Bowie's co-operation, RCA promoted *"Heroes"* more heavily than *Low*, coining the memorable slogan "There's Old Wave, there's New Wave, and there's David Bowie." Press notices in the UK were more positive, with *NME* branding the LP "mature and trenchant" while *Melody Maker* found it "adventurous and challenging" (both papers eventually made it Album Of The Year). Released in October, it hit No 3 in the UK but only managed 35 in the US, where Bowie's track record was less established (prior to 1983's *Let's Dance*, anyway) and electronic rock still an alien novelty. Even so, *"Heroes"* was eulogised by Patti Smith in *Hit Parader* magazine as "a cryptic product of a high order of intelligence…behind my shades I imagine him there in Berlin, stumbling through old boxes and props in the street . . . I imagine him in love with the whole world or totally dead." When Bowie's buddy John Lennon started recording *Double Fantasy*, his stated ambition was to "do something as good as *'Heroes'* . . . ".

Back in Britain in October, Bowie recorded another version of "Heroes" for *Top Of The Pops* at Visconti's Good Earth Studios in London, with Ricky Gardiner standing in for Fripp. In his first promotional interviews for two years, Bowie proved reluctant to interpret the LP's meaning. He told *Melody Maker*'s Allan Jones that he was generally pessimistic, but added, "There's some relief in compassion – and I know that's not a word usually flung at my work. *"Heroes"* is, I hope, compassionate."

Almost 25 years on, *"Heroes"* sounds not just compassionate but triumphant. With the soul-sapping self-exorcism of *Station To Station* and numb withdrawal of *Low* behind him, Bowie was in his healthiest state for a decade. The album could have ended with the elemental bleakness and dissonant sax screams of "Neuköln", but instead it swishes playfully into the twilight with the flighty, fleet-footed disco bauble "The Secret Life Of Arabia". Even the instrumentals contain musical jokes, like the jaunty homage to Kraftwerk's deadpan joker Florian Schneider in "V-2 Schneider". This was Bowie returning the favour to his Düsseldorf soul brothers for namechecking him and Iggy on *Trans-Europe Express* – but also kicking his Teutonic gloom habit for good.

There is a heaviness to *"Heroes"*, but a hefty shot of black humour and post-traumatic relief, too. This is the sound of Bowie purging himself of three dark years of paranoia and self-abuse, musical therapy and chemical freefall. Berlin was no longer his "clinic", although flashbacks to past madness still lingered in the shadows of his Schöneberg apartment. "It took two years in Berlin to really cleanse the system," he later admitted. "I'd have days where things were moving in the room and this was when I was totally straight!"

By late 1977, Bowie's globe-trotting curiosity was back to full strength. In the autumn he holidayed in Spain with Bianca CONTINUES OVER»

ANDREW KENT

“NOTHING ELSE SOUNDED LIKE THOSE THREE ALBUMS. MY COMPLETE BEING IS IN THEM... THEY ARE MY DNA” ***BOWIE***

Jagger and in Kenya with his young son, Joe (Duncan Jones). In November he flew to New York to narrate a version of *Peter And The Wolf* with the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, ostensibly as a "present" for Joe. He was no longer a mere rock star, but a painter, actor, composer and "generalist" of the arts. Beneath its monochrome gravitas and jabbering hysteria, *"Heroes"* tells a tale of redemption and recovery.

The new year began with yet more drama for Bowie. In early January 1978, his estranged wife Angie ended up in hospital after a couple of apparent suicide attempts. At the time, Bowie was in Berlin, shooting *Just A Gigolo* with director David Hemmings.

Hemmings had flown to Switzerland just before Christmas to persuade Bowie to star as Paul, an emotionally numb ex-soldier who becomes a gigolo in Berlin during Hitler's rise. Intended as a black comedy, the film was released to widespread hostility a year later. Most reviewers singled out Bowie's wooden performance for special punishment.

"They missed the point," sighs Hemmings. "The point about that character is that he's a sponge – he's supposed to be cold and somewhat thick. You don't get Ziggy Stardust if you want to see someone playing a German soldier who survived the war. That's called acting."

Bowie himself later disowned the film, dismissing it as "my 32 Elvis Presley movies contained in one". Hemmings calls this judgment "massively unfair, and it does down himself, me and the film far more than it deserved. David thinks we didn't take it seriously enough, but that's not my directorial style. If we had taken it seriously, it would have been a very depressing shoot indeed."

After the shoot, Bowie took another safari with his son, before starting rehearsals for the Stage extravaganza, his most ambitious world tour to date. It would bring *Low* and *"Heroes"* alive for the first time, as well as coating half of *Ziggy Stardust* in a shiny varnish of New Wave modernism.

Alongside stalwart sidemen Alomar, Davis and Murray, Bowie recruited new players, including 28-year-old Kentucky-born guitarist Adrian Belew. On Eno's recommendation, Bowie poached Belew from Frank Zappa's band during one of Frank's own interminable guitar solos at a Berlin show. Spotting Bowie and Iggy over by the monitors, Belew strolled over for a surreptitious chat. "Later that night," says Belew, "we tried real hard to sneak off and have a private talk, but inadvertently ended up in the same restaurant where Frank and some of the band were at. The jig was up. David tried to talk to Frank, but Frank wouldn't have anything to do with him. He kept calling him 'Captain Tom'. It was an ugly scene, really."

Eventually, Belew got Zappa's blessing and headed off to rehearsals in Dallas in March. Gathered at a hotel on the edge of town, the band crowded into Bowie's room one night to watch Beatles spoof *The Rutles*. Kicking off in San Diego on March 29, Stage was a juggernaut which toured the globe for six months in '78, filling arenas of 20,000 people and more. With its neon backdrop and space-age jumpsuits, it received hugely positive reviews but translated into an oddly muted double live album, released in September.

The tour's European leg ended with three shows at Earl's Court in July, two of which were filmed by David Hemmings for a proposed movie. "We shot it with about 10 cameras over two nights," Hemmings recalls. "We put it all together in Majorca, where I had a house, and David came to stay. But at the end of it he didn't like the cut, so he never released it." Bowie confirms, "I simply didn't like the way it had been shot. Now, of course, it looks pretty good and I suspect it would make it out some time in the future."

In September, Bowie and most of the Stage band took a break from touring to begin work on the last of the Berlin/Eno trilogy. Like *Low*, *Lodger* was not actually recorded in Berlin. Instead, it was started at Mountain Studios in Montreux, and eventually finished at New York's Record Plant in March 1979.

Originally titled 'Planned Accidents', *Lodger* was constructed using more self-consciously disruptive methods than *Low* or *"Heroes"*, resulting in a kind of Dadaist collage effect. "It was a lot more mischievous," says Bowie of the third Eno instalment. "Brian and I did play a number of 'art pranks' on the band. They really didn't go down too well. Especially with Carlos, who tends to be quite 'grand' . . . "

Lodger overturned the monolithic minimalism of *Low* and *"Heroes"* with a cluttered pile-up of ethnic funk, sampled static and jarring musique concrète. In many ways, it was more experimental than its two siblings, but it lacked the emotional kick of either. A case could be argued that this is Bowie's lost classic, but its listless mood and muddy sound are undeniable flaws.

"I think Tony and I would both agree that we didn't take enough care mixing," says Bowie. "This had a lot to do with my being distracted by personal events and I think Tony lost heart a little as it never came together as easily as *Low* and *"Heroes"* had. I'd still maintain, though, that there are a number of really important ideas on *Lodger*."

Visconti calls it "a strange album, dark and light", made in "two uncomfortable studios" at a time when "cocaine was ubiquitous and naively abused".

Released soon after the critically savaged *Just A Gigolo*, in May '79, *Lodger* was not well reviewed. RCA tried to pitch it as Bowie's *Sgt Pepper*, but *Rolling Stone* called it "a footnote to *"Heroes"*, an act of marking time", while *NME* sniffed that Bowie was "ready for religion".

Smartly drifting away from pure electronica just as synth-pop copycats flooded the UK charts, *Lodger* predicted a decade of Western pop flirtation with multi-cultural flavours. But it also alienated die-hard fans hoping for Bowie's next bulletin from the depths of Teutonic despair. Siouxsie Sioux calls *Lodger* "the first of many to disappoint", while Stephen Morris says, "It's crap, everyone sounds bored…" Meanwhile, the demystification of Bowie continued. TV and radio appearances showcased droll, chatty, New Wave Dave. During a return match with *The Daily Express*, Jean Rook was amazed at the transformation from three years earlier, when Bowie had been "chalk-skinned, bloodless and apparently dying, if not undead. He looked like a cross between a stick insect and Dracula." This time, a beaming, tweedily dressed Bowie reminded Rook of "Edward before he met Mrs Simpson… interviewing him is like coming across a daisy in hell."

During his last months in Berlin, Bowie sensed an ugly new mood in the city. His local Turkish café was smashed up by neo-Nazis, and the owners attacked. Bowie began fretting about whether this was any longer a suitable place to bring up Joe, who was now in his father's custody. Fascism may not have attracted Bowie to Berlin, but it was clearly a factor in his decision to leave.

By the time he completed *Lodger* in New York, Bowie's Berlin therapy session was over. He moved into a Manhattan loft in spring '79, plugging back into mainstream art-rock currents. He recorded and performed with John Cale and Blondie's Jimmy Destri, attended shows by Talking Heads, Nico and The Clash.

He also began preparations to storm the post-punk high ground with his next album, *Scary Monsters*. Like Berlin, New York was an edgy melting pot of art and sleaze, music and sex. But it was also a fresh start, the next chapter, a blank page. A new career in a new town. "I had not intended to leave Berlin, I just drifted away," Bowie now says. "Maybe I was getting better. It was an irreplaceable, unmissable experience and probably the happiest time in my life up until that point. Coco, Jim and I had so many great times… I just can't express the feeling of freedom I felt there."

With a quarter century of hindsight, Bowie eulogises his Berlin trilogy with a twinge of poetic nostalgia for the spooked chemistry and demonic depths which shaped them. "Tony, Brian and I created a powerful, anguished, sometimes euphoric language of sounds," he says. "In some ways, sadly, they captured, unlike anything else in that time, a sense of yearning for a future that we all knew would never come to pass. It is some of the best work that the three of us have ever done.

"Nothing else sounded like those albums. Nothing else came close. If I never made another album it really wouldn't matter now, my complete being is within those three. They are my DNA."

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Be a Hero – just for one day! You can book a guided tour of Hansa Studios – and the famous Studio 2 – conducted by former recording engineer Thilo Schmied. Fritz Tours' four-hour excursion also takes in Bowie's former flat at Hauptstrasse 155, and a quick drink at Bowie and Iggy's old haunt, Anderes Ufer…

ANDREW KENT

"I THINK THERE'S A LARGE SNOB FACTOR IN WHAT I DO"

1978. On the set of *Just A Gigolo*, MICHAEL WATTS finds Bowie chainsmoking Gitanes, practising his linocuts and reflecting on his tumultuous decade. To be discussed in depth: art, sex, fame, punk, drugs, a life in "constant flux", and that "absolutely ghastly" Bob Dylan.

TAKEN FROM
MELODYMAKER
18/02/1978

DOWNSTAIRS, IN THE blood-orange cavern of the Café Wien, David Bowie and Kim Novak are tangoing among bare tables.

Here, especially at this noon hour, one may usually find the old ladies and gentlemen of Berlin sitting over their black coffees and their memories; but a red plush curtain shuts out the world of the Kurfürstendamm, and the vast room echoes to the sounds of the dancefloor: the ringing heels of shoes – one pair in black patent leather, the other low-cut in silver – the cavalier strains of the tango, and the coaxing voice of the dance coach.

Novak, her thick, blonde hair cut in a bob and surmounted by a large white feather, is a glittering kingfish in royal blue, Bowie, as hippy and angular as ever, looks uncannily, in his tight, black pants and waistcoat and white shirt, like the stage performer of his last tour.

Together they wheel and dip and advance with outstretched arms, their bodies cocked at each other, for this is a dance that was spawned in the brothels of Buenos Aires; and her expression, as she swings around in his arms, is rapt, although it may be that she is really concentrating on the piece of gum that has never left her mouth.

They have been at it for more than two hours, working up heat and "polishing, polishing, polishing", when the coach orders a rest, and Bowie flops at the table. "Look, maw," he announces delightedly to the few people standing around. "I kin tango at last! Kin ah go into town and git me a gal now?"

This is my third day of filming on *Just A Gigolo*, but I have only just become used to the changes in David Bowie.

Initially, of course, they are physical. For the part of a '20s gigolo, of Austro-German parentage, he has been required to look conventionally handsome.

His once red hair has returned to its original pale colour and is sleekly parted on the right, so that his face seems delicate, even refined, where in the past it has been provocative; and then, without the violent cockade of hair, those infamous platform boots and generally flamboyant accoutrements, the cultivated appearance of a gentleman comes easily within his means – though he will never be a John Buchan hero; he's just a trifle too good-looking.

More fundamentally, though, he is not the David Bowie he began with five years ago, the Bowie whose charm was outrageous and excitable, who transparently calculated his effects, who vulgarised his sexuality for theatrical ends, and whose anxieties about what he was doing plainly lay not far beneath the surface.

That is a somewhat different man from this decently British, unaffected CONTINUES OVER»

Just A Gigolo, with Bowie as Paul Ambrosius von Przygodski and Curt Jürgens as Prince

chap filming now in Berlin who every morning, in a burst of enthusiasm, brings me Polaroid snapshots of his paintings, mounted in a brown leather album. And how can it be? For Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, the Cracked Actor and other assumed roles gather dust in a closet somewhere in America, most probably Los Angeles, and David Bowie has turned 30 years of age.

For 18 months now he has lived quietly in Berlin, while maintaining in Switzerland a house he rarely visits for Angie Bowie, the other half of his still-celebrated marriage.

He has chosen Berlin largely for its cultural reputation, and particularly for its association with Expressionist art, a style which also establishes the mood of his own, rather impressive, paintings.

The fiercely emotional content of Expressionism – which the artist Kandinsky once described as "the element of the inner impression" – is unmistakable in his anguished portrait of Iggy Pop (who has his own apartment in Berlin), another of himself which has a distinctly predatory look, and (his own favourite) a picture of Yuklo Mishima dominated by huge unnerving eyes – in all of them the eyes are like vortices dragging one into the painter's orbit.

Furthermore, it was the severe style of the Brücke artists earlier this century – as well as Man Ray, he insists – that influenced the brilliant black-and-white stage settings of his last touring show.

So, it has been Berlin and art; and next year he even intends to enrol in an art college, either in Berlin or Basel. But now, all the moments when he is not touring, making records or filming he spends painting. The day is for the culture palaces of Berlin, the evening is for paint and brushes, he says.

It is not Berlin's sybaritic reputation that impresses him. Long ago he had his fill of "decadent" Berlin – the fuck clubs and the drag bars with their ageing queens, some of them in their sixties and seventies, who are held to be artists. To him it is not the risqué city of myth, and maybe it never was.

He has a good anecdote about his friend, Christopher Isherwood, whose literary reputation was made among the events of the late '20s and '30s, telling him that even then Berlin was quite boring. And so, according to the story, Isherwood became responsible for the whole legend in the Western world of Berlin's feverish pleasures that the movie *Cabaret* has reproduced as fact.

"Young Bowie," he had been succinctly informed, "people forget that I'm a very good fiction writer."

Bowie's own picture of his life in Berlin is normal to the point of caricature. The Germans do not pester him as he rides around, dressed in peasant's cap and olive windcheater, on his three-speed Raleigh bike.

Berliners are very sardonic, matter of fact. He has found, to his amusement, that they think the British are totally lacking in humour; a neat upending of national stereotypes.

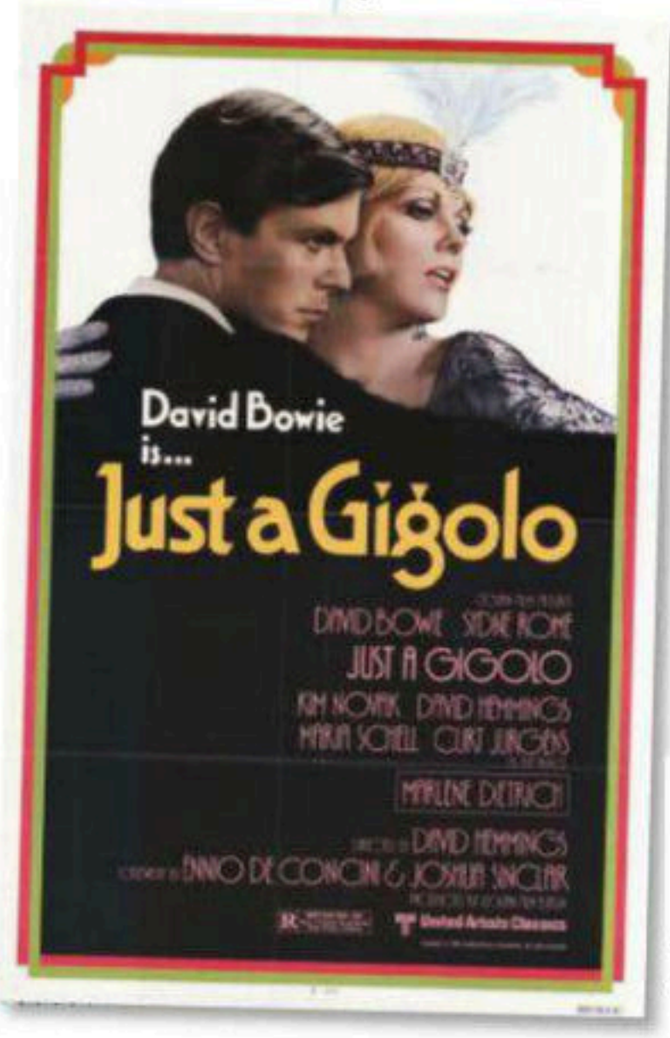
And their own attempts at humour unfailingly delight him. "This is a German joke?" he will ask brightly, and they will flap their hands in disgust and walk away.

There is only one rule: do not speak about the War or the Wall.

Berlin is good because, although he has many German friends, he can be alone, without the pressures of rock stardom. He says hardly anyone visits him, and, since his understanding of German is slight, he keeps in touch reading the *International Herald Tribune* and the London *Times*.

It is as though his spiritual convalescence, after traumatic years in America, has actually blossomed into a new life, as he acknowledged on *Low* with "A New Career In A New Town".

Out of the painful separation from MainMan Management, which boosted him as a potent but uneasy combination of apocalyptic visionary and teenybop star, out of the rigours of role-playing and the blind dates with drugs, has emerged a more stable, mature person, whose desperation is now reserved for a need to be taken seriously as an artist.



"DAVID IS AN ACHIEVER. HE CHANCES HIS ARM AND MOSTLY SUCCEEDS. A RENAISSANCE MAN..." DAVID HEMMINGS

The partnership with Brian Eno on *Low* and *"Heroes"* seems to have both steadied him and rekindled an enthusiasm for music that was finding no direction. All his working life he's never had anyone as intelligent as himself with whom he could communicate ideas and from whom he could learn; while Eno's own keen interest in painting, his relationship with the artist Peter Schmidt, has cemented the bond. Both men are essentially elitists working most visibly in a medium which professes communality and has a large, basically young public that is suspicious of art, though not of fashion.

A fanatical self-improver, who once lugged trunks full of books across the USSR on the Trans-Siberian Express, Bowie is always fascinating for the ways in which he presents to this audience information from outside rock'n'roll.

Any moment he could land on his arse, but his career has been motivated by self-risk as a concept, and he is still very much with us; that is a good basis for speculating that he will outlast and outshine all other contemporary rock performers.

Certainly, his music has always been remarkably receptive to new influences; hence the many changes in style, as different as is the "plastic soul" of *Station To Station* and *Young Americans* from the "new music" of *Low* and *"Heroes"*. But his voracity for artistic experience was bound to take him outside rock, which he has said from the early days with MainMan would never monopolise him.

Coolly, with a hint of self-mockery, he now describes himself as a Generalist, a term that embraces all his contradictions as well as activities; as he says, it sounds better than a jack-of-all-trades.

The film he made two years ago with Nicolas Roeg, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, was really an art-house movie, despite the commercial build-up it had in this country (where it never truly caught on).

Roeg's cold, elliptical and authoritarian direction, together with the abstracted nature of the alien being he was playing, wrung no great performance from its star; but *Just A Gigolo*, a wry tragic-comedy, does make definite demands of his acting ability.

The director, David Hemmings, whose role as the moddy photographer in *Blow Up* helped define pop culture in the '60s just as surely as Bowie has done so in the '70s, is out to make entertainment. He says that Bowie has caught perfectly a quality of "intelligent helplessness" that his part requires; that of a Prussian officer who returns penniless to Berlin after World War I and eventually becomes a gigolo, though without ever quite mastering the subtle techniques.

"It's about a boy trying to find his own way in a time and situation which was changing so rapidly that no-one knew what they wanted," Hemmings reflects one evening in a local bar, his voice full of those boozy, theatrical tones that increase the distinction of some British actors.

"In the end all the characters opt for the easy way out. They all sell themselves. But it's lightly ironic, tongue-in-cheek, about the period. We have brownshirts, for instance, who march out of tune. We explode the myth of Germanic organisation."

The end of the film is literally a dying fall. Bowie, in a closing sequence which prefigures the rise of Hitler, is hit by a stray bullet during streetfighting between the Communists and the Nazis.

CORBIS

Last tango in Berlin: with Kim Novak on the set of ... *Gigolo*, February 1978

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

On its release in 1979, *Just A Gigolo* was panned. Reviewing the film for *NME* on February 24, Angus MacKinnon called it "a disaster of interplanetary proportions". As for Bowie, his "dramatic ambitions obviously far outweigh his abilities, Hemmings seems to have let him indulge himself..."

Both parties try to claim the body, but the Nazis finally bury him as a hero of a cause he never espoused.

Hemmings is complimentary about Bowie. "The character he plays, Paul, makes things happen by default. His presence is always there in the action, but he never gets it right, he always slightly misses – a quality David himself definitely does not have.

"On the contrary, I think David is an achiever. He chances his arm on things and succeeds in most of them. A Renaissance figure, I think."

Bowie was suggested for the role by his Italian agent, whom he shares with Sydne Rome, the fawnlike American actress who was in Roman Polanski's *What?*. Here she plays the gigolo's childhood sweetheart who gets involved in the left-wing activities of the day.

Hemmings went to see Bowie in Montreux and found they had "similar attitudes to things"; in fact, Hemmings, still boyish in his mid-thirties despite greying hair and a cute little paunch, has sung onstage himself, having been a boy soprano and, more recently, a performer in the ill-fated musical, *Jeeves*.

"Yes, I was familiar with his earlier records – now I like the later stuff – but I don't treat him as a rock star in this film, I think of him only as an actor, and I think if he'd been asked to do more in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, it would have been a better film.

"What's more, he has a very great asset. The camera likes him. The camera loves him. It makes up for it even when he's not at his best."

Bowie has not lacked movie offers. He has already turned down a part from the Italian director Lina Wertmüller, whose films, notably *Seven Beauties*, have made her the rage of America and continental Europe. "Very Rightist," he explains tersely.

But he was attracted to this film by the chance of working with Hemmings, whom he considers more of an actor's director than is Roeg, and whose advice he is seeking about stage acting.

He is also enthusiastic about its evocations of the turbulent '20s, a period of art and social history that deeply interests him, one which is referred to in his next film, *Wally*, about the Expressionist painter Egon Schiele.

In fact, the action of *Just A Gigolo* begins in 1918, the year which saw the death of Schiele, an artist whose brief life (he died at the age of 28) was lived at a rare emotional pitch and produced work that is frequently tormented and painful.

In July, in Vienna, Bowie begins eight weeks' work on the film, called Wally after one of Schiele's girlfriends, which will be directed by Clive Donner (*Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush*, *The Caretaker*, etc).

He has a financial interest in *Just A Gigolo*, which is budgeted for between four-and-a-half and five million dollars, a relatively small outlay for a film which has some intriguing co-stars.

There is Hemmings, of course, who plays his wartime commanding officer and later on a moving force within the growing Nazi party; and there is Curt Jurgens and Kenneth More in a cameo.

But in Paris last December the German producer, Rolf Thiele, entered into secret negotiations with Marlene Dietrich, who has not made an international, German-financed movie for more than 40 years, and whose last big role was in *Judgment At Nuremberg* in 1961.

Amid great ballyhoo in the Berlin press, she signed her contract earlier this month.

She plays a baroness who recruits her young army of gigolos for elderly ladies, and has a scene in which she sings a famous old '20s number. "Schöner Gigolo, Armer Gigolo" ("Pretty Gigolo, Poor Gigolo"), from which the film has been developed.

And then there is Kim Novak, sex siren of the '50s, when all Hollywood girls were "curvaceous, blonde bombshells" but were neither thought nor

CONTINUES OVER»

expected to have much going for them between the ears.

Novak, like all the other stars excepting Bowie, was suggested by the scriptwriter, an American expatriate in Europe named Joshua Sinclair.

Although in her mid-forties, with her most famous films, like *Bell, Book And Candle*, long behind her, she is still a convincing sexpot in the role of a society matron who seduces Bowie and starts him on his professional career in the taxi dance.

When I asked Hemmings if she had been signed for her associations as a sex goddess in a movie that he admits is tongue-in-cheek, he slyly smiled. "Let's say the possible irony had not escaped my notice."

It was certainly not lost on the Italian husband of Sydne Rome, a husky, amorous-voiced photographer called Emillo Larl, who had taken exclusive shots of Novak in 1965 when she married actor Richard Johnson in Aspen, Colorado. "I remember paying the *Daily Express* photographer £1,000 to lure the other photographers away, and then we shot her on this platform in the snow. She remembers it, too."

Like many another man on the set of *Just A Gigolo*, Larl retains his ripe memories of the younger Novak; and, though her jaw is now a trifle heavyset, the all-round, frank nature of her appeal is evident to anyone.

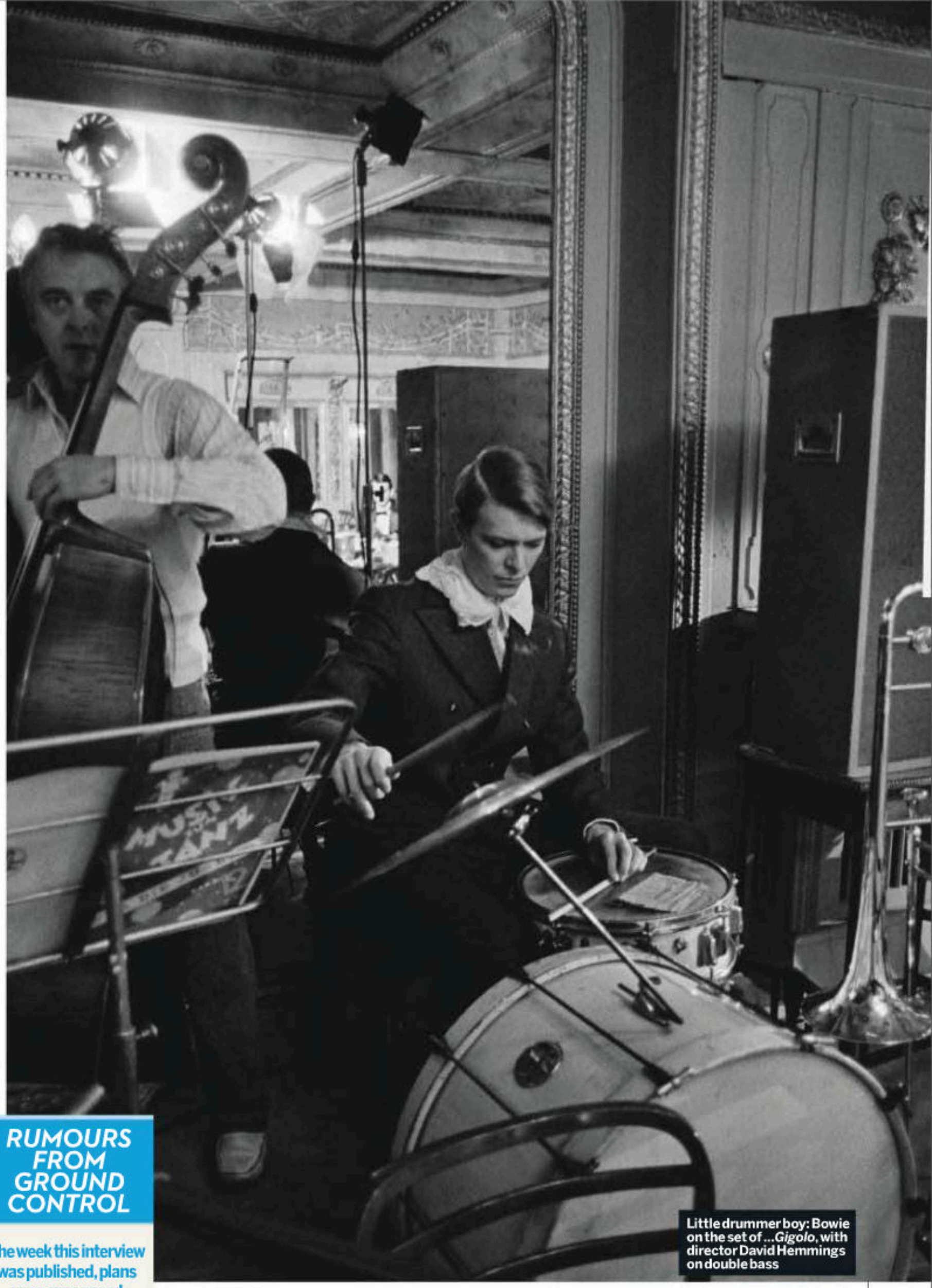
"A splendid woman," Bowie remarks one morning as he disengages himself from another *Come Dancing* clinch. "She oozes femininity, doesn't she? Happily married, though." To a vet, it turns out, who obviously helps her look after her many cats and dogs. She is very big on animals.

Across the set Kim is chewing on her Wrigley's and swigging from a bottle of soda pop. Now and then she breathes at her make-up girl, but there is an attitude of discreet distance about her. The star, which she undoubtedly is, carefully maintains her aloofness. There is a story that for one crucial scene she was required to wear a dress that was in period but insisted on one of her own. She returned to America, slimmed off some weight, and came back with a pink chiffon affair. Very nice, but very '50s.

Useless to deny, however, that it sets off to perfection her splendidly proportioned bosom. In the scene where she is instructing Bowie in various social graces, she gets carried away in volumptuous ecstasies.

She trails pink gauze as she slinks across the room, and her hands slide over her body, the lower half of which makes unmistakable overtures.

"Tacky," whispers someone on the set. But it was a she.



Little drummer boy: Bowie on the set of ...*Gigolo*, with director David Hemmings on double bass

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

The week this interview was published, plans were announced for an extensive World Tour. The *Stage* extravaganza would stretch over the rest of '78, and included Bowie's first tour of Australia. A documentary, directed by David Hemmings, was filmed at Earls Court, but never released.

At the Café Wien (Vienna), Hemmings bounces into view, like a springy rubber ball, dressed in a cricket pullover and white cotton trousers. Bowie asks him how he feels today. "Not too shabby, not too shabby," he chirps.

I have perceived that it's one of his favourite phrases. Another, which occurs when he's pleased with a take, is "let's commit this to celluloid before it gets any better." And, when annoyed by undue noise on the set, he calls out, "What we need is a couple more Trappists."

Hemmings doesn't need the autocratic attitude of a Josef Von Sternberg – a fact which will surely relieve Marlene. He is firm, but pleasant and flexible; one never forgets that he is also an actor.

A sense of humour can be useful when filming, though. There is, not least of all, the question of having to get up at five and six in the morning to be ready to shoot at nine.

Today, for example, the tango scene is being filmed upstairs in Café Wien, in a spacious room where palm fronds wave among the delicate coronations of *eau de nil* and eggshell blue. The extras for this scene, however, are not as flawless as their surroundings.

There are about 50 of them, and they rather resemble figures in a George Grosz drawing; as, indeed, they should, for this is supposed to be the place where the plain and aged ladies of society rendezvous with their young men.

Seated before gleaming cutlery and starched linen, powdered, rouged and smothered with ostrich feathers, these beldames with their high, Roman noses and crepe necks eye the assiduous gigolos, who seem as sleek and brilliant as whippets in their tuxedos.

MIRRORPIX, CORBIS

Let's dance: with Kim Novak and Hemmings

Music at a careful tempo is being played by a small group of old men with red and quivering Prussian faces, among which is a glass eye that stares balefully over the rim of a violin.

Rarely before has a musical group been able to muster so many broken veins between them. But now here comes Hemmings in his cricket pullover, striding through this tableau. He has suddenly been inspired. He has recalled a favourite shot from an old movie – a long shot of a guy walking through some cloisters – and right before him he sees… arches!

He walks towards these arches, framing the angle with the fingers of both hands; steps through them, still expounding on the shot to Charlie, the German cameraman – and is pulled up short.

Sprawled asleep on an antique, salmon-pink chaise longue hired especially for the scene and apparently so fragile and expensive that not even the stars may so much as brush it with their bottoms, is a nice, middle-aged lady in her '20s finery who is snoring away oblivious.

Hemmings takes in this startling apparition with one long glance, and then continues his explanation. He has a good heart.

Certainly, although he shows the effects of working a 20-hour day to keep the film running on time and budget, he is calmer than the unit publicist.

This is a smartly dressed German in a camel coat who informs one that he's writing a book about Elvis Presley. Today the story has exploded that Dietrich may be in the movie; the producer, it appears, has informed some newspaper without first telling him.

Hans storms across the set, in an opposite direction to that which Hemmings has taken; and in a windmill of furious gestures declares to the table where I'm sitting that he's had enough: "The press here are calling me up and saying, 'What are you? An asshole?' I say to you, and I say to Thiele, I am a professional. I cannot work like this. Tonight I quit."

And abruptly, off he walks, leaving me wondering what his book will be like. But the next day he is still there; it has all blown over. It's just one more headache for the director.

So how do you feel, Mr Hemmings? "Not too shabby, not too shabby," is the brave reply.

In between takes, which are exhausting and interminable, Bowie has been doing linocuts – a much-favoured medium of Die Brücke artists – and fulfilling his usual quota of three packs of Gitanes a day.

For the film he has to do peculiar things, such as strolling around inside a nine-foot bottle advertising a drink of the period, so that all one sees are a small pair of feet inching down a road; and in another scene he has spent a whole day opening a door and letting his pushbike clatter to the floor as he returns home from the war to his poor old mother.

Mütter is played by the fine Austrian actress, Maria Schell, an adorable, birdlike woman who last year, against type, played an evil scientist from the planet Krypton in Marlon Brando's forthcoming *Superman*. At the same time as *Just A Gigolo*, she has also been filming with Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

"HE'S GOING TO BE A GREAT ACTOR. HE LOOKS AT YOU AND HE IS REALLY FEELING IT DEEP INSIDE..." MARIA SCHELL

"Sometimes it was the one by the day, the other by the night," she explains gaily. "It was like having two lovers."

Towards Bowie she seems genuinely maternal, solicitous as many do become who get to know him a little. As filming starts one day in a gloomy pension in an old, stone apartment block, she enters with a vast loaf of bread, which Bowie receives with fond indulgence. "Everyone wants to look after my health," he grins.

Having taken Bowie under her wing, she talks to him about acting – she who a quarter of a century ago was playing opposite Trevor Howard in *The Heart Of The Matter*.

Bowie remarks that he doesn't mind becoming older because of the experience it brings. "In fact, I look forward to being 40." Schell says, "Yes, you have none of the weight of success you have when you're young."

She is very struck by him as an actor. "I think he's going to be a very great actor, and you know why? Because he looks at you and he is really feeling it deep inside.

"Some actors, they are only playing for themselves."

Her expression is very serious, but she is shaking with laughter when she shows Bowie her morning paper, which carries a big picture of her actor husband, Maximilian, seen in a New York club with Bianca Jagger. Bianca's lips are parted in what dangerously resembles bliss. Maria finds it monstrously funny, the wife of the Rolling Stone and "my Max".

"Now they will say Max and Bianca are having an affair," Bowie joins in the laughter, and he should know about these things.

Always anxious to talk about his work, equally he bridles at the questions about his marital life so beloved of the British popular press. His personal publicist says he's a dream to work with – "he knows exactly what he wants, and he understands how to give a good quote" – but he doesn't like *The Daily Mirror* asking about the state of his marriage and if he's really a bisexual.

He also likes to control his publicity, and has become adroit in this. Wherever possible, he vets all his photos; and when a German TV crew shoots him unawares rehearsing the tango with Novak, he becomes icy. It is the correct, approved David Bowie that must be presented to the public.

When he toured last spring and summer with Iggy Pop, and Iggy was re-emerging after his own struggles with drugs, he was scrupulous about not taking any of his publicity. But he must have known, because he was stage managing Iggy's return, that his own appearance would enhance interest in the tour.

Still, to make sure everything went right, he, a confirmed train buff, overcame his fear of flying. There had been talk of them all sailing to America, but there wasn't time, and eventually he'd thought, 'Oh, this is silly,' and flown anyway.

He lost his fear so completely that in October he flew to Kenya, where he stayed at the Treetops, the safari home of the Royal Family, did some big-game shooting (by photography), and visited Masai tribesmen.

He is anxious to return to Kenya; less so to England. He says there's nothing in England for him anymore, as far as he can tell from his short visits there.

But when he went back for the funeral of Marc Bolan, one of his oldest friends, he decided to take a look at Brixton, the area where he was born.

The house he had lived in as a child, in Stansfield Road, was still there, but he had not felt able to ask if he could see inside. Brixton seemed more intimidating than he had remembered it.

Only five years ago, I point out to him, he was living in Beckenham and working on his campaign to take over the world. He recoils. Horrible memories! Horrible. But the past keeps turning up. When last in London he was presented with a bill for unpaid rent by his old Beckenham landlord. No, he is unlikely to live in London again.

CONTINUES OVER»

Boys keep gigging: Bowie with Devo backstage at Max's Kansas City

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Tony DeFries' MainMan Management helped propel Bowie to stardom, but their split was messy, and expensive. Under the terms of their contract, MainMan claimed half of all Bowie's earnings from *Hunky Dory* to *David Live* and 16% of all future income until 1982.

Occasionally, reality intrudes upon the make-believe of filming. For some time the film crew had been aware of an awful smell in the apartment block where they were filming. It seemed to emanate from one particular apartment, and it began to get worse.

There was never any response from the apartment when they knocked, and the old gentleman who lived next door, an alcoholic who lived with his two dogs, could smell nothing, he said.

Finally, a policeman got into the apartment, and a minute later rushed out again. He spent some time heaving up his breakfast. There was a man inside who had been dead at least three weeks.

Now the fact is, according to German law, the police cannot enter the home of a suspected suicide until they can smell the body. This is a German joke, ja?

But just try telling it to David Bowie.

The following interview with David Bowie was conducted at brief intervals during four days' filming of Just A Gigolo. *The interviewer had to put up with the film crew playing trumpets and old gramophone records of German marches, as well as a film extra belting out songs at the piano. "I hate these blues sessions," says Bowie. Once, a long time ago, however, he used to play saxophone behind Sonny Boy Williamson…*

***MELODY MAKER*: I haven't talked to you since February 1973, when you were performing at Radio City Music Hall in New York. You've since left – amid a lot of publicity – MainMan Management and Tony DeFries. How do you feel now about DeFries?**

BOWIE: [*Long pause*] Yes, that's an interesting question. My anger was spent a good couple of years ago, and all the feelings of being used, done-out-of and whatever, they've more or less melted into the mist. I suppose now it was all rather important in a way. I certainly would not have achieved the degree of notoriety, I think, without all that nonsense going on. If I was an egoist I guess I could say that I would've done because my performance was good enough, but one doesn't know.

Without some of those initial ridiculous fusses, some of the best things never come to light. It did come to light through the efforts of him and the crazies who were running around at that time, and so I guess I'm thankful for that period in one way.

But I'll never condone completely what went on. I don't know whether I was absolutely manipulated. I believe that a lot of what were initially very good ideas were cheapened for the sake of getting something out economically rather than going the whole hog and doing things properly.

Stage shows were never what they were supposed to be because suddenly the money was not there to pay for what I wanted initially. Things would always be done on a shoestring and I could never understand why, because apparently we were very, very popular and… "where's the money?"

All that was involved. We have settled now. I don't think any of it was amicable, but it's mellowed out now. We have an understanding. We have to deal with each other from time to time – but not on a personal level.

You would never go back to him?

Oh Lord, no! That's absolutely… it couldn't be further from my mind. I have literally no idea of what he does, where he is and what kinds of things he does anymore. It was an astonishing, chaotic period. Very tumultuous.

What are your feelings now about the sex angle? (In January 1972, at the outset of his career with MainMan, Bowie confessed to the *MM* that he was bisexual, the first rock star to make such a declaration. The remark had huge reverberations.)

It seems easier for people to assimilate that now than it ever was before. I've got two views about it. Initially, I thought it was a good polemicist's basis; it was something to throw in people's faces. But on the other hand it had a disastrous effect on my credibility as a composer and writer for a long, long time.

Why did you tell me?

Do you know, I've never really understood

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why. It certainly wasn't a premeditated thing. I was starting to build Ziggy, he was starting to come together. And I was naturally falling into the role, and it was using one's own resources, and you sort of pick up on bits of your own life when you're putting a role together. Bang! It was suddenly there on the table. It was as simple as that.

I read that article again for the first time the other day. It's very coy and embarrassing.
Yes, but imagine in a few years' time, that will become an archetype interview of that period. You mustn't feel embarrassed. No, no! I know exactly what you mean, but you wait and see. Mark my words, mark my words. It's the old McLuhan thing about the cliché, archetype. I'm sure only a few years after he made them Chaplin was very, very embarrassed by his first movies – but all these years later! There was nothing like that before then, and a whole school of something or other has come from them. And I was sort of half-serious then when I said that I'd developed a school of pretension within rock'n'roll. I can see why I said that. I don't necessarily agree with it now. I only said it as, again, a throwaway. But there is some strength in it, I think. Quite definitely.

I remember an interview about 18 months ago in *The Village Voice* with Cherry Vanilla (once Bowie's US publicist at MainMan). It was a piece about marketing gays...
Oh God. Marketing gays.

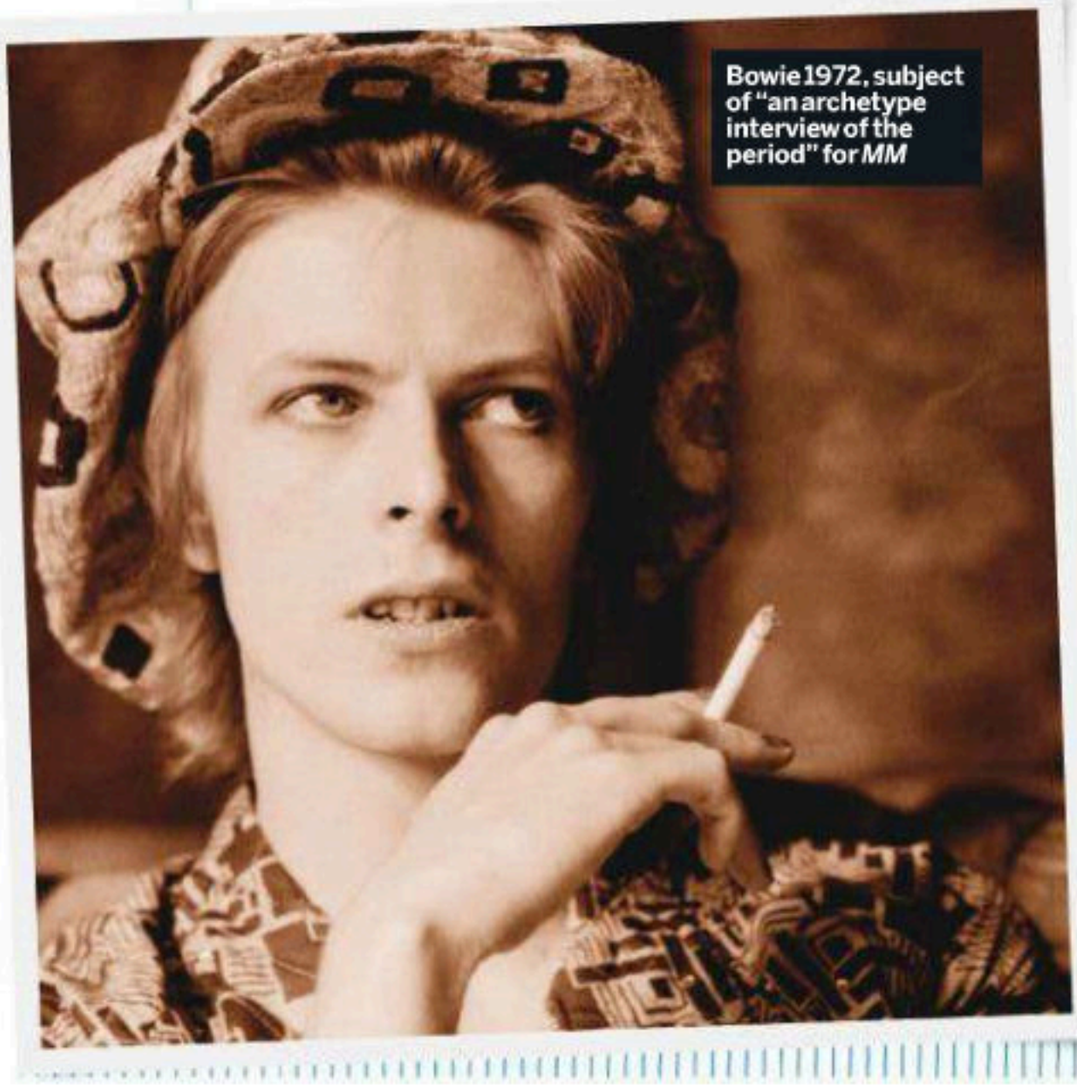
And she said, "We peddled David's ass like Nathan sells hotdogs."
Good Lord. Chronic, isn't it? I hope she meant it tongue-in-cheek. I know what she meant, yeah. She worked very hard at pushing that side of me, because it gave her very easy access into headlines. And all the time that that was going on, of course, I was in another country, so it was hard for me to keep any sort of control.

My compromise at the time was to live with it when I got to America and found out how I'd been set up to be over there, and I thought, 'My God, I can't fight this enormous snowball. I'll have to work with it and gradually push it back down to something more manageable.'

But I'd just started with Ziggy, and I couldn't suddenly drop it then. He was Ziggy, he'd been created, and that was my piece at the time, my theatre piece. I thought, 'Well, I'll have to use what Ziggy's got and be what God's given him,' [*short laugh*]. So I had to work with him for a little while those first few months in America.

You put yourself on the line, too, by involving yourself in other artists' careers. I've always wondered why, considering that you've had such personal success, you should want to build, or rebuild, others' successes: Lou Reed, Iggy Pop and now Devo.
I guess it's because there is still a lot of fan in me. I do get impressed with new things. I can't help but be. I like to feel that if I can't do that myself then I'd like to be part of it and try and... especially people who are not being noticed. I'd love to be responsible for helping somebody. I think that's great for my ego.

They've not been acts of unadulterated kindness, then?
Oh no, no. Good Lord, no.



Bowie 1972, subject of "an archetype interview of the period" for *MM*

"ROCK MUSIC IS ALWAYS 10 YEARS BEHIND THE REST OF ART; IT PICKS UP BITS AND PIECES..."

But you did receive some rather horrible criticism, particularly in relationship to Lou, that you were coming up on his back.
I did read a lot of that, of course, and I never denied it because it seemed such a shallow observation of what I was doing. There are very, very few parallels between me and Lou Reed.

I think I've only ever written one song like his, and that was "Queen Bitch", and it was only recognised as a Lou Reed song – and I know this for a fact – because I wrote next to it "For Lou" [*on the sleeve of Hunky Dory*].

"Andy Warhol" was next to it.
Oh yes, yes. Those two together. But I don't think my career was based on those two songs, and there is very little else that I have done that is anything near approaching what Lou Reed does or has done. I find it very hard to find a comparison between me and Lou.

I've never written about street people or such, or the gossip of the day, walked like him, dressed like him, performed like him. I think that's really shallow. We got on very well. I found him very witty, in a very New York way. And the same again, I might add, applies to young Iggy as well, 'cos I've also read that a coupla times.

But, you know – and I did it partly for the amusement factor – I have always noticed that if I put out certain names as my influences to see if people would pick up on them and then say I was definitely influenced by them, then every time I've done it, it has always come back. Always, always, always!

I could say that my greatest influence, in fact, was Tiny Tim, and they'll say, "Ah, of course! Quite obviously David Bowie has lifted an enormous amount from Tiny Tim." Always it works in that fashion. I don't blame anybody because I do it purposely – I certainly used to do those red herrings just to see how it affected people, but it amused me that they would take something like that and convolute it and make it into a statement of their own.

Let's move from the past to the present. How do you feel about this film as compared with *The Man Who Fell To Earth*?
A totally different kettle of poissons. This has so far been a far more enjoyable experience. For one reason or another I'm a lot closer to David than I was with Nic [*Roeg*]. Nic is less approachable. David [*Hemmings*] is a far more generous personality.

Roeg's an intellectual.
Yes, he has those leanings. David not so much; though, of course, he is of a sophisticated nature. Creatively, quite as extraordinary as Roeg in his way.

Do you feel that movie was a success?
I think that's debated by everybody that's seen it. I think there's a lot of pro, a lot of the reverse. I still have only seen it the once – the one time that I saw it in the cinema – and I still feel that I learned more by the actual process of making it than seeing the film in a finished state.

I didn't enjoy it as a movie to watch. It's very tight. Like a spring that's going it uncoil, it's full of terrific tensions. Of course, that's part of the so-called magic of the film; that it's got these very inhibited feelings in it.

There's a repressed feeling of something or other boiling under the surface all the time. It's never allowed to come out, so it leaves you with that terrible feeling that you've had a restricted viewing of something.

Would you agree that it's a film about a man who originally is pure but ends up being corrupted and disgusted with himself?
The way Nic interrupted that purity, looking at the way it's cut, he seemed to have interpreted that purity in a perverse way. There's something awkward about it, CONTINUES OVER»

Loving the alien: as Thomas Newton in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*

gawky; there's something not right about that person's purity. I suppose on surface value, that's the film Nic was making, yeah.

Nic had a lot of other intentions that he never confided – well, not to me, anyway. He's a secretive man. And, indeed, at that time I was also pretty closed about talking with anybody, really.

Yes, I want to ask you whether you saw any parallels between yourself and Thomas Newton, the strange character you played in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, which is why you took the role.

Oh, that's a dangerous trap to fall into! Sort of, it was quite easy for me. When I did, it was hook, line and sinker, I would've thought [*laughter*], I mean, Nic exerts such a tremendous influence over one psychologically that one does carry the weight of the image around for a bit afterwards.

He was a cold, inexpressive character. This is what your image was at that point.

I think I was very frightened of expressing any kind of emotion then, which of course, followed with the most dramatic and traumatic experiences on the Station To Station tour when I became over-emotive. I went through great waves of despondency and ecstasy… and I'd kept a lot of things pretty well repressed for a few years.

So that was a very cathartic point in your life?

Oh, Christ, yeah. I feel much more on an even keel now.

But you're a volatile man, to say the least. It could happen again?

Yes, I get scared stiff of the idea of touring again because of all kinds of experiences that one has. Once bitten, maybe twice shy. I hope that I don't get back into that situation again.

Do you mean drugs, and other things, as well?

All the things. The testing of one's personality to the fullest; can you cope on a tour? When you're shouldering the responsibility of the whole thing, it's quite easy to break up. Either way, you close up or you let loose. My tendency goes either way. God knows how it's gonna affect me. But I'm a lot healthier and fitter beforehand this time.

You appear to be enjoying acting, anyway.

I'm finding it enthralling to be really getting into a person's flesh this time around. I really feel very much at home with this character, being led and shown how to do it.

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Working titles for Bowie albums include: Metrobolist (*The Man Who Sold The World*), Love Aladdin Vein (*Aladdin Sane*), We Are The Dead (*Diamond Dogs*), The Golden Years (*Station To Station*), New Music: Night And Day (*Low*), Planned Accidents (*Lodger*) and Vampires And Human Flesh (*Let's Dance*).

But you've always been interested in creating personae!

Oh yeah, yes, but I've never approached it this way. It's impossible to explain really, but it's a question of following through thoughts rather than just like a parrot reciting the words… This is wonderful! [*breaks off*].

It sounds like [*assumes brittle, actorish voice*], "Well, of course, there's only 3,584 words in *Othello*. As Peter Brooks used to tell me, now you know all the words, all you have to do is get them in the right order." [*laughter*] I hate talking about acting. I don't know enough about it.

Tell me how you got involved in the movie about Egon Schiele.

It was originally suggested to me that I should play the part by Clive Donner, the guy who did *The Caretaker* and *…Mulberry Bush*. He sent me the original script and I jumped at the idea of it, because Schiele was somebody I was aware of. Wally was one of his girlfriends – pronounced "Valley". *Wally* is just a working title. I think it will be changed. It will go through the time from when he was leaving Klimt as a pupil and setting himself up as a painter, through his prison sentence and to

RONALD GRANT, RETNA

the end of his relationship with his girlfriend, Wally. Charlotte Rampling is on the boards to play her at the moment. I don't have much say in the actual casting. Donner I don't know that well, but he's very, very intelligent. It seems that all the time I pick on the English and European directors.

The next person that I'm meeting in a couple of weeks' time is Fassbinder, with the possibility of doing *The Threepenny Opera* with him, a re-make. He's now getting into doing English language films.

I've seen him in Berlin a couple of times, but I've never been introduced to him or had a chance to chat to him.
Supposedly a strange sort of guy, very weird. This is such a strange sort of movie for him.

I think it's everybody's efforts to pull the strange quantities together and see what comes out – an idea that I go along with completely. Planned accidents.

Whatever happened to *The Eagle Has Landed* and *Stranger In A Strange Land*?
The Eagle Has Landed I was turned down for the part, and *Stranger In A Strange Land* I didn't want to be involved with because I thought it would be a bit typecast [*short laugh*]. It was also during the MainMan period. But I was violently against doing *Stranger In A Strange Land*, having realised it would be, you know, "get out of that one".

I'd be alien for life. I'd just be stuck out there. All I'd be offered would be people with green skins and varying colour hair – that would be the only character change I could make, hair colour.

People do associate you with futuristic things, don't they?
I don't know now whether it's so futuristic. I never thought of myself as a futurist. I always thought I was a very contemporary sort of figure, very Nowish. Rock is always 10 years behind the rest of art; it picks up bits and pieces. I mean, I only picked up Burroughs years after it all happened in literature, and actually applied it to my work. The application wasn't made until years after it was a dead and gone style; it'd been finished in literature a long time.

And that happens with rock, it's only just reached Dada now. So, as far as putting me as a futurist, I think the fact is I'm as contemporary as I feel I need to be, and a lot of the rest of what's going on pays a retrospective look to what's gone down before. It's work generally in an atmosphere that's about five years behind. There's so much of it that it seems to represent today, but it isn't, in fact; it's using references, feelings and emotions from a few years back.

I've always thought there was a lot of England 1890s about you, as well. Beardsley and Wilde, etc.
Oh yes! That was a very strong influence, the idea of the Aesthete, the elitist [*laughs*] – a point which Brian [*Eno*] and I share. I think there's a large snob factor in what I do.

You once said to me, "I'm an actor, not an intellectual," and yet critics see in your records ideas rather than emotions.
I've decided I'm a Generalist now!

A Generalist?
Yes. I thought that just about covered all grounds. It encompasses anything I wish to do, really. I find, for instance, I really want to paint seriously now, and not toy with it, and I am painting very seriously now, every available moment.

And I'd like to be known as a painter one day when I get up the nerve to show them. But I want to be known as a Generalist rather than as a singer or a composer or an actor. A Generalist is a very good occupation to have.

How about this contrast of ideas and emotions? Critics do tend to find more ideas in your work than other musicians'.
Again, I think the sum total of the parts is greater than the input, very much so, and especially on the latter stuff that I've done. There were a considerable amount of very diverse ideas that went into the album, but the sum total of all those ideas is something extraordinarily different to that which I expected to come from the album when I made it.

For me, listening to *"Heroes"* is quite as new an experience as any other listener listening to it. They're never what I expected them to be.

There was, apparently, a quite casual, happy atmosphere in the studio with Eno. But the music didn't turn out that way.
No, no. I thought it was a nice, exercising process, but it turned out to be a substantial piece of work, which was very satisfying.

Tony Visconti, who helped produce it, told me that you made *Low* because you felt you were becoming predictable.
Yes, yes – I felt I was very predictable, and that was starting to bore me. I was entering an area of middle-of-the-road popularity which I didn't like, with that disco soul phase, and it was all getting too successful in the wrong way. I want and need creative, artistic success.

I don't want, need or strive for numbers. I want quality, not a rock'n'roll career. My ego is such that I do wish to be recognised as offering something fairly worthwhile, and when I feel it is getting a bit ploddy it embarrasses me and I wish to move on.

Do you think there is a general theme to your records?
[*Pauses, then mischievously adopts a Dr Bronowski voice*] "Is there an element of the irrational in the human spirit?" [*Laughter*] Yes, I think the irrational is very much part of it all, and the combination of the wrong elements in the wrong place at the right time.

That's very vague.
Yes, I don't think I would like to subject myself to complete analysis of my work, really.

With the exception of *Hunky Dory* and *Pinups*, there's a very chilly technological feel about much of it.
A bit chilly, you think? I think it's not expressed in general, emotive terms; love or anger, or whatever. The emotional scale is somewhere above top C [*grins*]. The emotions on it are those rarely touched by writers. That's what gives it the chilly feeling.

But I don't think they are chilly emotions – I think they are just rather surprising emotions that are lurking in one's head somewhere that are very rarely expressed, possibly because one doesn't feel there's an occasion to express that kind of emotion.

I still don't know whether there is an occasion to express that emotion, but I'm expressing it on those records if anybody needs it!

Well, they obviously do, because they're buying the records. Although, without knowing their sales, I would have said that the last two LPs didn't do as well as the others.
Oh no, of course not, no.

And that doesn't bother you?
Not at all. It's rather pleasing in a perverse kind of way.

CONTINUES OVER»

Band of brothers: Bowie, Iggy and Lou

"I FIND IT HARD TO FIND A COMPARISON BETWEEN ME AND LOU. I'VE NEVER WRITTEN ABOUT STREET PEOPLE..."

That does smack of snobbery.
Yes, I know it does. Brian says he's most embarrassed that *Before And After Science* is doing so well in New York – of course, he's lying through his teeth, he's very pleased. But he said, "I did everything to put people off buying it. I went over there and did my utmost to dissuade people from purchasing the aforesaid article." In fact, *Before And After...* is receiving a very good reaction in the States.

But as far as you're concerned, isn't there a chance of you losing your audience?
Oh quite.

But it doesn't bother you?
No. No. There comes a time when you go through the most ridiculous posture of saying, "I'd be really pleased if everybody stopped buying my records so I could go away and do something else."

There's an ounce of lunacy at the back of one's mind when the album comes out. "Let's see if this one can really crash, really bomb." There's a little bit of oneself that actually thinks that.

Because that would mean there's now no constraint to make a record for that particular audience?
Absolutely. And then you can take the whole bull by the horns and just record something underneath a table with a cassette recorder, or whatever, and all those things one says one's gonna do one day.

But Lou Reed tried that with *Metal Machine Music*, didn't he, and it didn't work for him?
I haven't talked with Lou for a long time, so it's hard to know exactly what was at the back of his mind. Of course, he promptly started producing very commercially orientated albums after that, so I don't know if it was a ploy to lever himself off RCA.

And he went back to his basic theme, writing about that kind of netherworld.
Yes, yes. I don't think he's too interested in writing about anything else, though. I don't know – I think Lou stays in New York too much. Having said that, of course, I now hear he's staying in Japan, so it's not entirely true.

Let's talk about the collaboration with Eno. What do you think you've taken from him?
That's a nasty question, a nasty question. 'What has he injected into my music?' is probably the more accurate question, and what he's injected is a totally new way of looking at it, or another reason for writing. He got me off narration, which I was intolerably bored with. Narrating stories, or doing little vignettes of what I thought was happening in America and putting it on my albums in convoluted fashion; Philadelphia, or New York or Los Angeles, "Panic In Detroit" and "Young Americans". Singer-songwriter askew.

And Brian really opened my eyes to the idea of processing to the abstract of communication. I don't think we agree with each other on everything. We're certainly not that simpático, where we embrace what each other says with open arms.

It's possible that my word-manipulation in songs has slightly changed his ideas. He enjoys the way I work with words and melodies.

How do you?
I still incorporate a lot of the Burroughs ideas, and I still purposely fracture everything. Even if it's making too much sense, I now fracture more than I would've done in the past. But it's still a matter of taking my three or four statements and inter-relating them.

Not as literally as I used to – I don't use the scissor method very much – but I'll write a sentence and then think of a nice juxtaposition to that sentence, and then do it in a methodical, longhand fashion. A lot of me goes into it now, whereas at one point it was getting very random.

It was far more random on *Low*. On *"Heroes"* it was a bit more thought about. I wanted a phrase to give a particular feeling. But never a song as a whole – I never had an overall idea of the feeling.

Each individual line I wanted to have a different atmosphere, so I would construct it in a Burroughs fashion. There are two or three

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Bowie was dead right about a slump in his sales. *"Heroes"* shifted 279,000 copies in the US – compare that with *Young Americans* (approx 923,000), *Diamond Dogs* (745,000) or even *David Live* (598,000). *Lodger*, meanwhile, sold only 153,000.

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A Berlin Wall of sound: Robert Fripp, Brian Eno and Bowie

themes in each song but they are interlinked in such a way as to produce a different atmosphere per line, and sometimes a whole batch of lines.

But I didn't want to restrict myself with one process, so I would use straightforward narrative for maybe two lines and then go back to disorientation. "Heroes" was the most narrative, about the Wall, on that album.

On *Low*, "A New Career In A New Town"...
That didn't have any words, though. [*Intrigued*].

But it did give you the impression afterwards that it had?
Yes, it does, doesn't it? That's exactly what I mean, that the sum of all the parts produces an astonishing feeling, and that you really feel that you understood something from it.

"Be My Wife" was quite specific. Was it genuinely anguished, or were you being tongue-in-cheek?
It was genuinely anguished, I think. It could've been anybody, though. But I think as a generalisation, what you find on both albums is a pot-pourri ranging from narrative song to, I suppose, in its own way, surrealism. In fact, some of the songs are very like those I used to write a long time ago, not so very different from something like "Quicksand" which was on *Hunky Dory*.

What's "Sound And Vision" about?
That was an ultimate retreat song; actually, the first thing that I wrote with Brian in mind when we were working at the Château [*D'Hérouville, near Paris*]. It was just the idea of getting out of America, that depressing era I was going through. I was going through dreadful times. It was wanting to be put in a little cold room with omnipotent blue on the walls and blinds on the windows.

But I do think Brian and I are very good collaborators. I've never been happy collaborating with anyone before to the extent that I do with Brian. We do have such varied interests that it makes for some very interesting speculations in the studio. It's nice to have a friend like that and to work in that relationship. I never thought I would work like that. I always felt very singular.

How did you get on with Bob?
[*Long pause...*]

Bob Fripp?
Oh, I thought you meant Bob Dylan! Didn't get on with him at all. I had a dreadful time with Bob Dylan. Absolutely ghastly. I talked at him for hours. I was fairly flipped out of my head, if I remember, and I just talked and talked.

"DYLAN! DIDN'T GET ON WITH HIM AT ALL. I HAD A DREADFUL TIME WITH BOB DYLAN. ABSOLUTELY GHASTLY!"

The funniest part about it was that I'd been talking about his music and what he should do and what he shouldn't, and what his music did and what it didn't, and at the end of the conversation he turned to me and – I hope it was in jest, but I have a feeling it wasn't – he said [*falling into a banal American accent*], "You wait till you hear my next album."

I thought, 'Oh no, not from you, please! Not that, anything but that!' I don't know whether I was in the correct state to appreciate him, but it was the first and last time I ever met him.

He never made any other contact with me [*laughs uproariously*]. That was in New York. I didn't find him odd, that was the problem – there again, when people meet me they generally don't find me as odd as they would have me be, so I guess it's one of those things where you build up a particular picture.

I lost all that fascination for him, I must admit, quite a number of years ago, though. Once, I had quite a thing about him.

Does any rock person now hold any interest for you?
I really don't think so, I really don't think so. At this particular stage I do feel incredibly divorced from rock, and it's a genuine striving to be that way. I refuse to listen to records, refuse to listen to music in general.

Not even Kraftwerk?
No... I don't think they have found their niche – I could turn that into a pun but I don't think I'd better! I've found a lot of their earlier work more invigorating than their later stuff, actually. I liked a lot of the stuff that seemed to be free-form.

That was when Neu! were with them, of course, and you had two very frictional elements working against each other – Neu! who were into complete volume against Florian's very methodical planning.

I can't get the same satisfaction out of them now, though I like them as people very much. Florian in particular. Very dry. When I go to Düsseldorf they take me to cake shops, and we have huge pastries. They wear their suits. A bit like Gilbert and George, actually... God, whatever happened to those two? I used to really like them...

When I came over to Europe – 'cos it was the first tour I ever did of Europe, the last time – I got myself a Mercedes to drive myself around in, 'cos I still wasn't flying at that time, and Florian saw it.

He said, "What a wonderful car", and I said, "Yes, it used to belong to an Iranian prince, and he was assassinated and the car went on the market, and I got it for the tour." And Florian said, "Ja, car always lasts longer". With him it all has that edge. His whole cold emotion/warm emotion, I responded to that. Folk music of the factories.

Were you influenced by Kraftwerk when you made *Low*?
I dunno if I was in a musical way. Some of their premises for wanting to make music I found interesting.

You say you don't listen to rock music, and yet you and Eno are producing Devo in Cologne.
Yes. First, I like their music, and then meeting them had a lot to do with it. I found them very interesting people, very much in the same sort of conventional pattern as Brian and Fripp, but an American equivalent. I felt there was an awful lot of enthusiasm in what they thought they could enter into eventually. The theory of their potential is very strong. I don't think it's fulfilled at this particular moment. You really should go and see them live.

I don't think I'm particularly interested in their basic premise of de-evolution. I just quite like their music and their lyric construction.

"Jocko Homo" reminds me a bit of "The Chant Of The Ever Circling Skeletal Family" off *Diamond Dogs*.
Yes, I like that piece of music, it was good. Actually, some of those pieces off that album would've been quite in place with some of the things I'm doing now, I think. The intro, sans poem, was a very interesting piece of music.

I would like to treat the Overture from Tannhäuser in a similar fashion CONTINUES OVER»

1978, and the world's a *Stage*: "Live, I've got to be on the panic-button level!"

to the way I treated "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered". *Diamond Dogs* was a hard sort of LP to live with at the time, but it does mature, doesn't it, and gains potency with time?

I don't like a lot of my albums. A complete album it would be hard to for me to say I like. I like bits and pieces. A bit of it works exceedingly well, and a lot of it only works.

You prefer to make them and put them out very fast, don't you?
Yes, absolutely. I don't like too much premeditation.

I've heard that you use a peculiar system of notation for the musicians.
I draw the music, the shape that it should look like. I have to draw the feeling because I can't explain it. The musicians who have worked with me have now learned the language. It's very contributive music.

The last two albums have been a curious mixture of disco funk and New Music, haven't they?
Yes, it's still there, isn't it? I mixed up the bass very high, of course, and did very extraordinary and naughty things to the snare drum sound over the last two albums as well. I wanted the snare drum to disorientate.

I was so incredibly bored with the drum sound one hears, especially the American drum sound of the last four, five years; the big, heavy, upfront bass drum, the make-it-sound-like-a-wooden box that's been there ever since "I Can Hear The Rain".

I said, it doesn't cut anymore. So we fooled around with the drums, and found that when we treated the whole drum kit it started to get back to a sort of psychedelic sound, and so we picked out different drums and treated them all individually. We found that corrupting the snare drum definitely put the whole thing out of focus with the normal perspective of how drums have sounded.

How did you come up with the idea of what I think you called "plastic soul"; the music of *Young Americans* and *Station To Station*?
Mmm, had a lot to do with where I was staying and at that particular time it was New York and Philadelphia. I thought, I don't write soul music but I do enjoy this. I also wanted to keep messing around with my lyrics as well, which are very unsoully.

So I juxtaposed the two: very unsoully lyrics over very soul-influenced music. It's always taking something and just twisting it. It's a very constant way of working that I have.

In those terms it's predictable, in that I will take something, look at it, and then say, okay, now let's just bend it out of focus and see what that does to our very comfortable positions. A little bit of unease.

You've never experimented with reggae, have you?
No, I don't like it very much. I got rather biased against it… I heard an awful lot of it when I was a kid, and I heard even more of it when I was a teenager of the ska and bluebeat variety, and rather unfortunately – I know it's terribly bigoted – but I find it very hard to come back into liking it again. It still doesn't move me. Maybe I just ain't got rhythm!

Going back to plastic soul, how did you come up with "Fame", for example?
It was, in fact, Carlos' riff to "Footstompin'" [*Carlos Alomar has been Bowie's guitarist for several albums*]. I wanted to do "Footstompin'" and I said, "Carlos, that is such a good riff, I'm going to take it away from that song, and let's do something with that."

And then Lennon came in and said [*Scouse accent*] "that's fuckin' great, that! Worra great riff that is!" And then John stood in his spot and made sounds, and it sounded not unlike "Fame".

You know, one often just makes sounds and those sounds become words, and then you think, 'Gotta word. Now out of that word let's create a subject and evolve that subject.' Things often start like that.

Can you contrast that process with "Warszawa", say, on *Low*?

> **"BRIAN ENO AND I TALK QUITE SERIOUSLY ABOUT THE IDEA OF WRITING MUSIC FOR HAVING A BATH TO. ABSOLUTELY"**

Oh, on my part that was a quite positive idea to try and take a musical picture of the countryside of Poland. But I didn't tell Brian that. The procedure of that one was really quite simple.

I said, "Look, Brian, I want to compose a really slow piece of music, but I want a very emotive, almost religious feel to it. That's all I want to tell you at this point. What do you suggest as a start? "

And he said, "Let's go lay down a track of finger clicks." And he laid down I think it was 430 clicks on a clean tape. Then we put them all out as dots on a piece of paper and numbered them all off, and I picked sections of dots and he picked sections, quite arbitrarily.

And then he went back into the studio and played a chord, and changed the chord as he hit that number, and went through his piece like that. And I did a similar thing on my areas. We then took the clicks out, heard the piece of music as was, and then wrote over the top of that according to the length of bars we'd given ourselves.

It sounds incredibly mathematical.
Oh yes, quite assiduously so. But each of those instrumental pieces was done differently – very, very differently – and that's what retains my interest on these albums.

How about "V-2 Schneider"?
No, that was much more of an idea of a sequence. Except we turned the riff around in the beginning, purely by accident. I started playing the sax riff on the offbeat instead of the onbeat. Halfway through I thought, 'Oh, I'm the wrong way round,' but we continued through. So now you get this extraordinary intro where it's all the wrong way round – beautiful! Impossible to write that – so I stayed with that and built it up from that wrong way round.

But I must say, that is why I'm so held to these albums; that each track is a whole different system of methods. It keeps me interested. It's incredible! And I'm still learning, every album I go in with Brian.

Now I've learned some of his methods quite thoroughly, and I'm fairly competent with them so I can utilise them on my own, but I'm still learning more from him.

Do you work more spontaneously?
No, he's spontaneous, but in a slow, methodical fashion. He allows accidents to slowly evolve, and I work very quickly. So Brian is probably in the studio for a far greater length of time than I am, because we often work separately – either of us will not be in the studio when the other is, so we don't hear what the other is doing. It sounds awfully… no, I don't care! It does sound, as you say, very mathematical and icy, but that doesn't defeat its ultimate musical impact. The impact is definitely an arrangement and presentation of some emotive force, and it does touch one.

Can you see a future in ambient records? You know, albums which say "this mood is Nostalgia, this mood is Sombre."
Oh, well Brian and I talk quite seriously about the idea of writing music for having a bath to. Yeah, absolutely. The idea of very subtle emotive influences for various parts of one's activities during the day could become a feasible reason for buying music, not just the old one, the '60s one, which is to buy to develop an identity with somebody else.

The cult figure thing will always, I suppose, have its place; but I think the idea of having environmental music – which of course, when it first came upon the world scene, was called Muzak – that cliché of Muzak will become an important archetype. It's not to be scoffed at.

At first I was furious when what we were doing was described as Muzak, but then, I reconsidered and thought, 'Well, yes, it does have roots in that somewhere along the line.'

The areas we are working in are so undefined at the moment, because they are relatively a new kind of idea for music – in the rock'n'roll field, anyway – that I find it very hard to analyse exactly what it is we're doing.

I think Brian is far better at

CONTINUES OVER»

EYEVINE

Opening night of the Stage tour – San Diego, March 29, 1978

analysing it. I still work instinctively, and I'm still very affected by environment, people, passions, whatever.

Are you going to play this music onstage when you tour in March?
I'm going to play a lot of the last two albums, a lot of it. Brian, of course, would love to be able to, but for reasons of his own, he is not able to complete a long tour.

He's certainly going to do some one-offs with me, and they may very well take place on the next tour. But I would imagine far more of them will take place on the last leg of the tour. For two reasons. One of them is his own business and the other is that he would prefer to play in places he has never been to before, because he does not like stage work. But he and Fripp will be doing six performances with me. I could only work with them if it was the unit.

I am going to play some synthesiser, with Roger Powell who's sort of with Todd Rundgren. Originally, I wanted Larry Fast, It will not be the same as Brian's, 'cos I wouldn't expect anyone to reproduce somebody else's work, but I'll certainly expand the framework within which we worked. Also, Simon House will be on violin, and Stacy Heydon on guitar this time, with Dennis [*Davis, drums*] and George [*Murray, bass*]. Again the reason Carlos will not be there this time is I was getting too confident with bands somehow [*smiles ruefully*]. It's the same story!

And so, the biggest test I can give myself is to remove what is considered one of the essential qualities of the stage performance and rearrange things by bringing in a violin instead of another guitar, and a synth rather than another keyboard, then I see what happens when I try to play my same music with a band which is not built for it quite the same way.

I've got to have the element that surprises me else I'm not on the panic button level, which I've got to be to make it live. If it becomes too sheltered and precious, it shows like hell and looks self-satisfied.

No, I'm in great anticipation of rehearsals, I've no idea what they're gonna bring. A bit worried, but very excited about working with new people.

You constructed no image, no persona, for the last two albums, presumably because the choice was so diverse. Does this mean that you've decided to stop conjuring tricks?
Quite definitely for the time being. I have no enthusiasm for that anymore, quite honestly. A lot of that's died since leaving America, it got me into an awful lotta trouble. It mixed me up quite a lot. I began to think I was Ziggy. And then, of course, Ziggy began to merge with the others, and I wasn't quite sure whether I'd completely dropped the last one or not. Bits and pieces would keep creeping through.

I'm intrigued by your role-playing. It's probably a bore to you now.
Somewhat, yes, but…

I'd like to read you something that Pete Townshend said to me about you. He said that you've "provided almost an alternative reality, a fabricated stable image which

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

November 1978: after the Stage tour hit Lang Park, Brisbane, Bowie was accused by Queensland's Minister for Local Government and Main Roads, Russ Hinze, of "disturbing our peace and tranquility." Hinze had received a wave of complaints: the gig was apparently so loud it could be heard from 6km away.

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people could react to, because he himself isn't stable, he is constantly in flux." I think he was talking specifically about Ziggy. How do you feel about that?
"Constantly in flux"? It sounds like I'm heading from that for a future as the Grim Reaper of the Avant-Garde! [*Laughs*]. Yeah… artistically, of course, I'm in constant flux. As a person, a living organism, I think I'm becoming a lot more rational and composed emotionally as I get older, and I welcome the age I'm moving into with open arms.

But that period of incredible role-playing, of Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane, you were emotionally unstable?
Oh yes, very much so. But I read in that *Sunday Times* article on Surrealism that somebody suggested all revolutionaries should be shot once they reach the age of 30, and I sort of see why, because one does become far more composed once one reaches that age.

But I do enjoy it. There's also a feeling, though, when one's in one's twenties, that it's got to be done in that time period, whatever the greatness is that one feels is in oneself.

But now one feels success is something a lot more to do with having a contentment with the way things are – not being apathetic towards them, but to not be quite so rational about things.

I recently decided to adopt the doctrine that a man reaches his most creative strength at around the age of 35. I've given myself another five years, ha ha.

You used to be given to contentious statements, like that grand one in the *Playboy* interview that you wanted music to "return to the sensitivities of the working class".
Mmm. There's always that appeal to me for making the obvious controversy. I mean, that was my Los Angeles era. Bloody awful. I was pretty fractured. I really wasn't in a fit state to have myself interviewed all that year.

No, I've always been wary of defining myself or actually having some concrete standpoint 'cos it does tend to shackle oneself. And I still don't have a viewpoint. I'm just as open to suggestion as ever.

How about your advocacy of Nietzsche and Homo Superior?
They were used very much in defiance more than anything else. I had a period where I was very fond of flaunting suspicious points of view in front of people merely for effect. I found that very rewarding.

It's hard to remain artistically illegitimate; it's so easy to become Establishment. That becomes a cause: "How can I avoid that next?" I'd hate to become part of the accepted cultural set-up. You know, "that's it, nicely in place." That's not what an artist wants to do.

Your incessant role-playing always led to criticism that you were more interested in style, in synthesising styles, than content.
Yes, I think I am still, in a way, interested in synthesising styles.

But not at the expense of content?
No, not at all, no. It's a very important mode of working. A style is the superficial arrangement of things as they are, and to juxtapose a few of these styles against each other produces some quite important artistic factors and results.

Do you read your press a lot?
Months and months later. I'm now reading the reviews of *"Heroes"*. There's a wonderful one I've just read, another one of those "he's driven the last nail into his coffin." It goes on about "this record will never move off the counter" and "it has absolutely nothing to say – he's completely lacking in any ideas anymore."

Actually, I think it had the line in it, "he can't write a good song anymore!" [*falls about*]. Damn right, it was American. But I've got to Texas now, and Texas seems to like it a lot. It's the first time it's happened to me in Texas.

But, you see, the only way to remain a vibrant part of what is happening is to keep working anew all the time. For me it always will be change. I can't envisage any period of creative stability and resting on any laurels.

I think for what I do and what I'm known for it would be disastrous. So that's my predictability. Again, it's the elitist in me, but I find it hard to consider that I am primarily still in pop or rock … I mean, I'd be the first to say I am absolutely and completely out of touch with what young teenagers are thinking. I have no idea.

"I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO INTEREST IN POLITICS WHATSOEVER. NEVER HAVE HAD, PROBABLY NEVER WILL"

Not about punk?
Artistically, I can understand, yes. But I don't know whether a 14- or 15-year-old on the streets thinks the way I was thinking at that age. I don't know; it'd be too much to expect that he would be thinking that differently.

By the same token, 30-year-olds think very much the way they've always thought, because I look at myself and say, yes, I was told when I was 30 that I would be a lot mellower than I was at 25. And I am, and it's a fact.

Yes, punks are supposed to be oppressed by the past and figures like you and, more so, the Stones and The Beatles.
Yes, yes. I think that's the point: now music for me is not an expression of generation anymore. I think that has changed. That's a very important point. I was, when I was younger, writing for a particular generation, and I considered it my generation.

Now I have widened my interest in music to not making a statement of a particular generation, but it's a statement of the emotive forces one feels in particular environments. It's no longer an age thing with me, it's a place thing, and place applies to any age.

So it's music for all ages one wants to fall into, but it's not confined anymore to the generation that used to be interested or, indeed, hopefully is still interested in what I've got to say. Although, actually, we are going through an incredibly important era. I think the '70s will have the same chaotic appeal to future generations as the '20s do to us.

I hope it doesn't foreshadow another holocaust, as that decade did.
Well, yes. But I don't think I'll limn that one anymore. It became a bit of a torch in my earlier period.

We've now entered the Aquarian Age, which is supposed to have terrible consequences.
Enormous. It has always been cited in the past as being the age of unbelievable chaos. And, of course, Halley's Comet comes around in '86. It all falls in place with the factual, scientific ideas that are going around. But I've dropped enormous clangers on that before, so I'm not gonna even start on it. A little knowledge can be dangerous – or can be put to great effect. If it's used only artistically, a little knowledge can be very symbolic of how people are thinking.

And how about your professed knowledge of politics?
I have absolutely no interest whatsoever. Never have had, probably never will.

You were needling us all again?
Very definitely, yes.

You have no interest in the political situation in Germany, for instance?
The kind of interest one has if one lives in a foreign country. But may I live and die an artist! Through the ages, though, a lot of artists have used those very spiky little things just to get people at it.

We're not going to see a flesh-and-blood re-run of Peter Watkins' *Privilege*, then?
[*Laughter*]. No, no.

Because the movie was terrible anyway.
But have you seen it recently? Much, much better than when it was made. It is really worth seeing, and I loathed it when I first saw it. I saw it again a couple of months ago – on Kenyan Airways, I think – and it is quite amazing.

Do look at it, and then remember that horrendous gig I did in London years ago – I think it was the retirement gig. An enormous arena. And it was all so fanatical and quite horrendous-looking. It was a cliché at the time. But now it makes a lot more sense, though not for what we thought it was about at the time.

You and Jean Shrimpton as the President and First Lady.
I think not, I think not. I think we've passed along that way once.

RELEASE DATE 18 | MAY | 1979

LODGER

Moving on: a restless, unanchored Bowie completes his Berlin trilogy, from the safety of Montreux and New York. *By David Quantick*

"IN THE EVENT *that this fantastic voyage/ Should turn to erosion and we never get old…*" That's one. Then there's, "*You KNOW who I am, he said/ The speaker was an angel…*" And of course, "*Heaven loves ya! The stars part for ya!*" One more – "*I'm home! Lost my job! Incurably ill!*" If there's an album with more great opening lines, well, you can find it. *Lodger*, the Bowie record that's so underrated you can hear the wheels bringing it round to be finally overrated, is one of those great David Bowie runts – *Pinups*, *Hours…*, *The Buddha Of Suburbia* – overshadowed by both predecessor and successor, marred in some historically insignificant way, but worth returning to time and again.

Lodger was not David Bowie's biggest hit of the 1970s. Following not just the jaw-dropping *Low* and *"Heroes"* but also the water-treading *Stage*, it was trailed by possibly Bowie's best single that didn't do as well as it should have, "Boys Keep Swinging". More of that pop of the cherry later. I remember *Lodger* coming out; with a ton of new wave records to buy in 1979, I finally went into Boots to get a marked-down copy in their sale. As she handed me my thin vinyl gatefold LP, the lady behind the counter said something to the effect that David Bowie had "blown it". I'm not sure if Boots staff in 1970s East Devon were given to using expressions like "blown it", but she wasn't alone in this view. After years of "artBowie", consumers were now going, "You're a bit weird. We get it."

And then there was "Boys Keep Swinging". These days "Boys Keep Swinging" just seems like "Classic Bowie"; a homoerotic lyric, a thumping chorus and a general air of campness which occupies the enormous middle ground between "John, I'm Only Dancing" and "The Laughing Gnome". It's one of Bowie's occasional funny records, genuinely witty, incredibly sharp and – in this case – accompanied by an almost career-ending video.

These days nobody would be offended by a short film of a man dressed as three different women, walking down a catwalk and smearing lipstick off their face. Right? We love all that nowadays! No way is pop video just a misogynist catalogue of pop stars drinking champagne and watching women in bikinis lapdance in helicopters. But in those days, when the "Boys Keep Swinging" promo film – directed by David Mallet, who later sensibly just videoed real ladies – was shown on *Top Of The Pops*, the record went down in the charts. And famously, Tubeway Army's "Are 'Friends' Electric?" went up, all the way to No 1. It was seen at the time as a sign that Bowie was over, while his copyists were about to thrive.

So "Boys Keep Swinging" flopped (well, it made No 7, but it should have gone higher), as did its brilliant, Talking Heads-imitating follow-up, "DJ" ("*I've got a girl out there, I suppose*," sings Bowie in his best blankly strangulated David Byrne, "*I think she's dancing/What do I know?*"). *Lodger* came out to adequate chart success, the 1970s Bowie album that most people didn't own. Which is of course an enormous pity. Hailed at the time as "the third record in the Berlin trilogy" – "Berlin" here of course meaning "Switzerland" and "New York" – it featured Bowie and Brian Eno at the end of their ideas partnership until the 1990s (Bowie would later equate Eno with the pop artist Richard Hamilton, but also add in the *Buddha Of Suburbia* sleevenotes, "Brian 'he singe lik a litul gerl ha ha'" so it's not all gravy with them). Perhaps reflecting this, there is a tiredness in Tony Visconti's original production, which may also explain the sheer heft of follow-up *Scary Monsters…*; here you long for songs like "Red Money" (the lyrical rewrite of Iggy Pop and Bowie's "Sister Midnight") or the later-remixed "Look Back In Anger" to have a bit of thunder to them. Unsurprisingly, it's the unrock songs here that sound the best – the etiolated Turkish reggae of "Yassassin" – a song so fine that Bowie played it on his own Radio 1

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"A nice-enough pop record, beautifully played, produced and crafted and slightly faceless…Expect heavy sales on this return to a more conventional style."
JON SAVAGE, MELODY MAKER, MAY 26, 1979

"The most enervating and enervated album he's made… A distracted, rather depressing, rather diffused jumble of hit-or-miss-and-run songs… I like it a lot."
ANGUS MACKINNON, NME, MAY 26, 1979

TRACKMARKS | Lodger

1. **Fantastic Voyage** ★★★★
2. **African Night Flight** ★★★★
3. **Move On** ★★★
4. **Yassassin** ★★★★
5. **Red Sails** ★★★
6. **DJ** ★★★★★
7. **Look Back In Anger** ★★★★
8. **Boys Keep Swinging** ★★★★★
9. **Repetition** ★★★★★
10. **Red Money** ★★★

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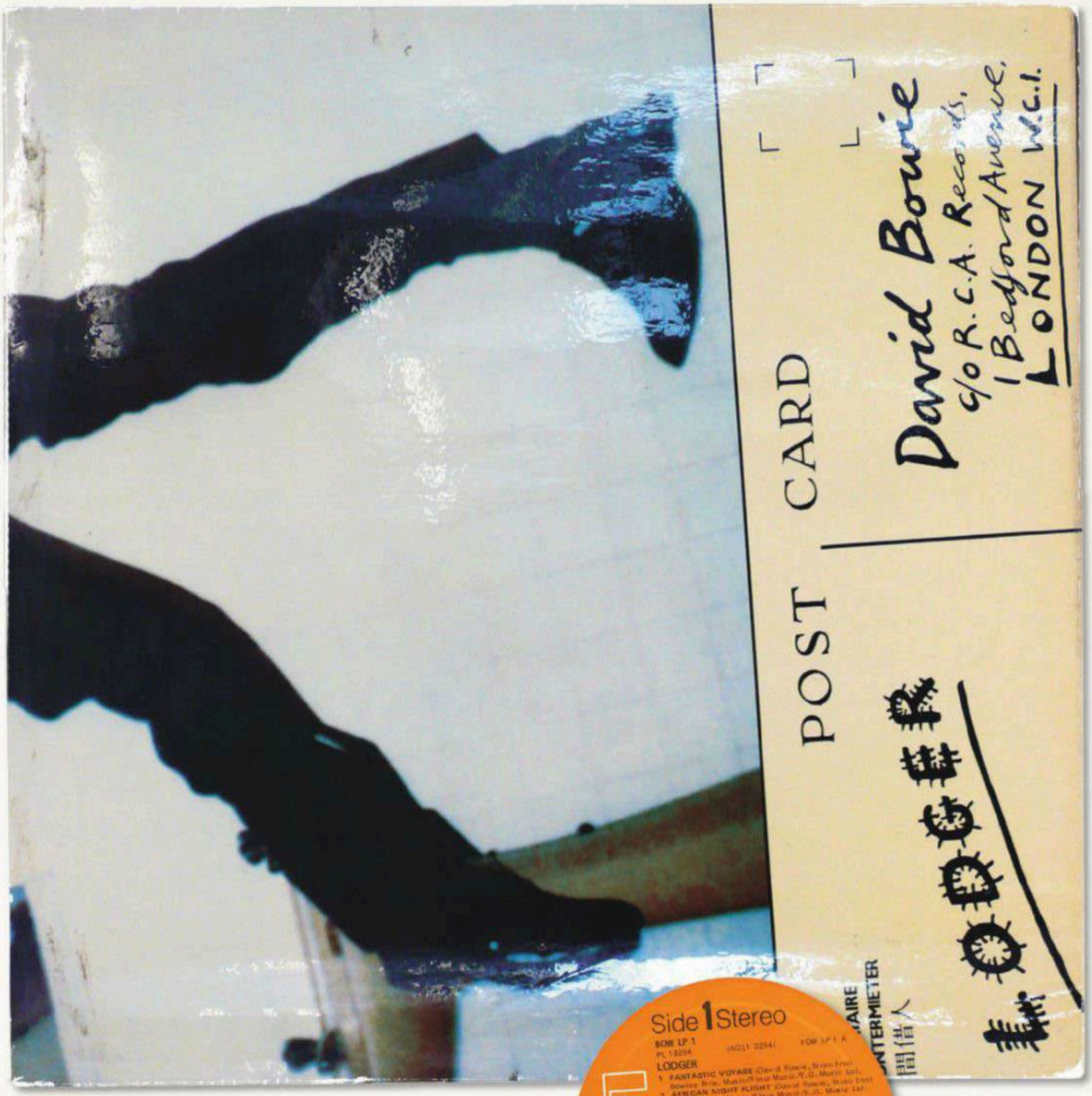
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Tony Visconti
RECORDED AT: Mountain Studios, Montreux, Switzerland and Record Plant studios New York
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, bk vocals, piano, guitar, synth, Chamberlin); Carlos Alomar (guitar, drums); Dennis Davis (percussion, bass); George Murray (bass); Sean Mayes (piano); Simon House (violin, mandolin); Adrian Belew (guitar, mandolin); Tony Visconti (bk vocals, guitar, mandolin, bass); Brian Eno (synths, ambient drone, prepared piano, cricket menace, guitar treatments, horse trumpet, eroica horn, piano, bk vocals); Roger Powell (synth); Stan) saxophone).
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 4; US 20



Star Special that year– or the *Bush Of Ghosts*-preceding ethnoclutter of "African Night Flight" (featuring Eno's "cricket menace", a sound he's described as "musical MSG", improving every song it's used on).

Most of the band were fed up with Eno's experimentation, being asked to play chords from a blackboard like they were at school and swapping instruments on "Boys Keep Swinging" (it works, although some bits were redubbed). There were experiments in recycling. "Move On", brilliantly, is "All The Young Dude"s backwards (see YouTube – keywords Move On Bowie Backwards – for proof), while "Fantastic Voyage" echoes Bowie's "My Way"/"Life On Mars" melodic trick by having the exact same chords as "Boys Keep Swinging" (whose b-side it is on 45). And the vague concept of an LP about the fractured nature of Bowie's life as traveller – reflected in the album's title, as well as "Move On", "African Night Flight" and others – rather peters out, unless "DJ" is about a mobile disco.

But *Lodger* is a unique record, full of extraordinary songs. "Fantastic Voyage" is a brilliant opening track, every line of which is a slogan for the times (and "*We'll get by, I suppose*," is a very Bowie-esque counter to the grand emotional drama of "Heroes"). "Red Sails" is as camp as a row of pink tents ("Pink Tents" would actually be a better title, in some ways). And then there's "Repetition". Singing in his blankest, most distanced voice, Bowie describes Johnny, an embitted Eisenhower male who hits his wife because he didn't get the life he wanted. Feminist, political, and entirely in tune with the music of 1979, "Repetition" was almost instantly covered by post-punk band The Au Pairs and musically is partly the template for most of Bowie's 1990s music (he revisited the character of Johnny for his favourite encore song, 1996's "I'm Afraid Of Americans").

Lodger's initial flaw seemed to be its lack of coherence; at a time when Bowie had released album after album cut to very specific cloths – Superstardom! The apocalypse! Plastic soul! Liking Neu!! – *Lodger*'s themes of alienation are a bit vague. These days, as our identities unravel and change every day, as we spread ourselves almost literally too thin on the internet and the global village becomes more like an overcrowded global swimming pool, they're spot on.

"I'M NOT AWFULLY HAPPY WITH WHAT I'VE DONE IN THE PAST, ACTUALLY..."

Scary Monsters is ready, but Bowie is engaged with another creature – playing *The Elephant Man* onstage. ANGUS MACKINNON corners him in the theatre for a thorough interrogation about everything from reincarnation to Gary Numan. "My audience has diminished remarkably over the years," he claims

TAKEN FROM
NME
13/09/1980

ONLY ITS PRETENTIOUS façade and brash neon hoardings distinguish the otherwise nondescript exterior of the Blackstone Theater from its surroundings in downtown Chicago. Its mirrored foyer gives access to a surprisingly spacious and comfortable auditorium that faces a wide, deep stage.

Walls and ceiling are in a restrained neo-classical style, and only the chill rush of air-conditioning reminds you that this is not the West End – that and the fact London audiences are extremely unlikely to see the performance the Blackstone is currently hosting: David Bowie starring in the American National Theatre and Academy production of New York-born and bred playwright Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*.

The Elephant Man was premiered in London at the Hampstead Theatre in 1977, has won several awards, played both on and off Broadway and recently enjoyed another London run with Paul Scofield in the leading role of John Merrick, the grotesquely deformed so-called Elephant Man from Leicester who was rescued

CONTINUES OVER»

ANTON CORBIJN

Bowie, Blackstone Theater, Chicago, August 1980

from a sad and sorry life as a Victorian freakshow attraction by the eminent surgeon Frederick Treves and who was subsequently lodged at the London Hospital in Whitechapel from 1886 until his death at the age of 27 in 1890.

Although it takes as many liberties with Merrick's genuinely pathetic story as it does with David Lynch's forthcoming, but very different film on the subject, Pomerance's play is a concise, fast-moving and compelling piece of theatre, by turns deathly serious and archly amusing, and one that places heavy demands on its lead player.

Merrick's physical abnormalities were extensive. His head was huge, egg-shaped and some 36" in diameter, his face terribly distended and dominated by a gaping, salivating maw of a mouth, his body draped with pendulous folds of skin that were themselves covered in foul-smelling, cauliflower-like fungoid growths, his right hand and arm a useless unwieldy lump; only his left arm, its almost feminine hand and his sexual organs were left unscathed.

As a result it would be impractical if not impossible for the actor playing Merrick to hobble about the stage for some two hours encased in some sort of second skin that realistically depicted such ravages, and so Pomerance resorts to dramatic artifice. The audience is soon made aware of Merrick's disabilities by the device of having Treves show a series of slides taken of the Elephant Man when he was first admitted to the London Hospital.

At this point in the play a curtain is pulled back to reveal a spotlit Bowie wearing nothing but a loincloth and standing with his legs apart and arms outstretched. As Treves dispassionately enumerates Merrick's afflictions, so Bowie amplifies the gist of the surgeon's lecture by gradually straining himself into the crumpled stance he will, one short scene excepted, adopt for the remainder of the play. This brief sequence of mime is astonishing enough, but there's better to come.

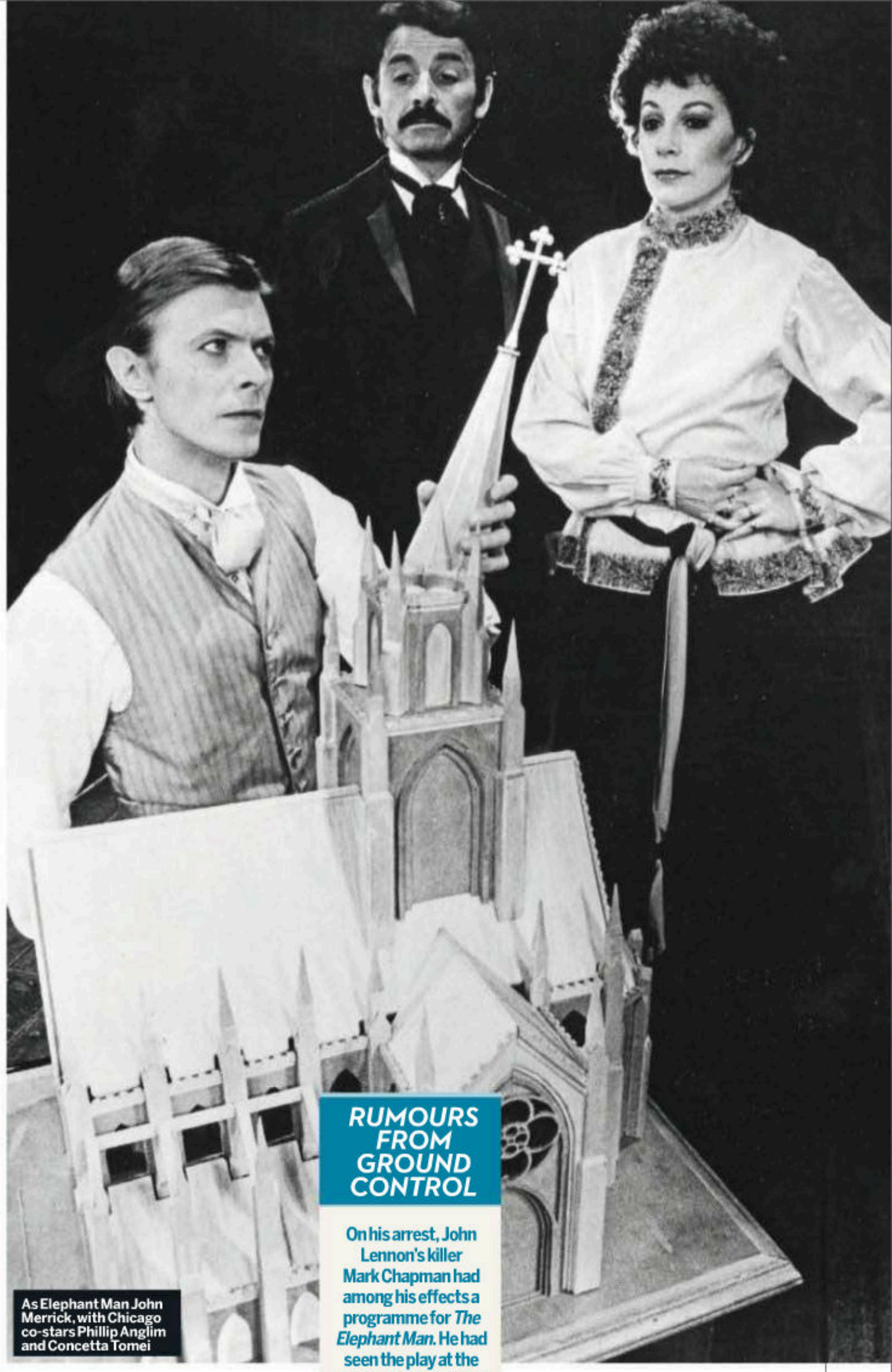
As well as having to adopt the Elephant Man's crippled gait, Bowie is obliged to speak in an odd, high, fluted voice out the side of his mouth, which in turn he has to violently contort. The character is also denied any degree of facial mobility since Merrick's own face was rendered effectively static by its peculiar bone structure, and so Bowie must rely on eye and head movements to express emotion, something he manages with unsettling conviction.

Bowie succeeds in extracting a dramatic maximum out of the part and, more significantly perhaps, he appears to have won the confidence and support of what is a very distinguished professional cast, one that he will leave behind him when he re-opens the play on Broadway in September. I can only add that I found Bowie's performance deeply affecting.

Merrick (whose real name was Joseph not John; Treves himself made the mistake) was by all accounts a remarkable man who possessed great intelligence and sensibility beneath his horrifying exterior. Both these faculties blossomed after he was taken into the London Hospital, and are dwelt on in some depth by the play. To be able to portray the first outward stirrings of this unusual mind encased in its shell of literally rotting flesh is no mean task in itself, made doubly difficult since The Elephant Man depends entirely on the ability of the actor playing Merrick to constantly project the man's awareness of his own predicament or, as Bowie puts it, his "newness" of mind and "physical vulnerability".

That Bowie manages as much and more in what is his first 'legitimate' role in the theatre is, to say the least, impressive – especially in the light of his last, excruciatingly hammy appearance on screen in *Just A Gigolo*. Time and again *The Elephant Man* hovers precariously between drama and melodrama, between tenderness and mawkishness, but Bowie's evidently absolute immersion in the part of Merrick enables him to express every nuance that Pomerance intended. As Dan, a hip black Bowiephile from New York who's passing through Chicago on business, remarks to me after Thursday's show, "The play's the thing. It really doesn't matter who is Merrick as long as he's good – and yes Bowie is very, very good."

Despite long-distance interferences from Barbara De Witt, who is nominally in charge of Bowie's press worldwide and who calls from Los Angeles to tell me that I will find myself in "a one-hour



As Elephant Man John Merrick, with Chicago co-stars Phillip Anglim and Concetta Tomei

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

On his arrest, John Lennon's killer Mark Chapman had among his effects a programme for *The Elephant Man*. He had seen the play at the Booth Theatre a few days earlier. Bowie was a rumoured 'second' target, and Chapman – like Lennon and Yoko – had front-row tickets for the Dec 9 show; the day *after* the murder...

LFI, WIRE IMAGE

situation with David", and despite the incompetence of RCA's Chicago office, who can only play me five tracks of *Scary Monsters* and who drone on about Bowie's "incredible creative input", photographer Anton Corbijn and I arrive at the Blackstone early Thursday evening. We have both met Bowie briefly after the play the previous night, but our impressions were at best fleeting.

We go backstage and are again ushered into Bowie's cramped dressing room. Anton asks if he can take pictures during the interview, but it is firmly rebuffed by Bowie: "I never allow it. Never. I find it most distracting". Exeunt Anton and Coco Schwab, Bowie's enigmatic personal press assistant, a helpful but reserved girl who has worked with Bowie for the past six or seven years, travelling with him wherever he goes, and who adopts a distinctly protective attitude towards the man.

Bowie grins a lot, looks extremely well and, lighting the first of a virtual chain of Marlboro, settles back opposite me adopting a suitably expectant but nonetheless commanding air. Almost shaking the Cola out of a paper cup with nervousness, I broach the vexatious matter of De Witt's time limit on the interview.

Bowie seems understanding of my position, but unimpressed by my banter. I've never met him before but I rapidly appreciate that he is not to be crossed. I begin to suspect that if he felt so inclined he would simply stop proceedings by elegantly stalking out of the room.

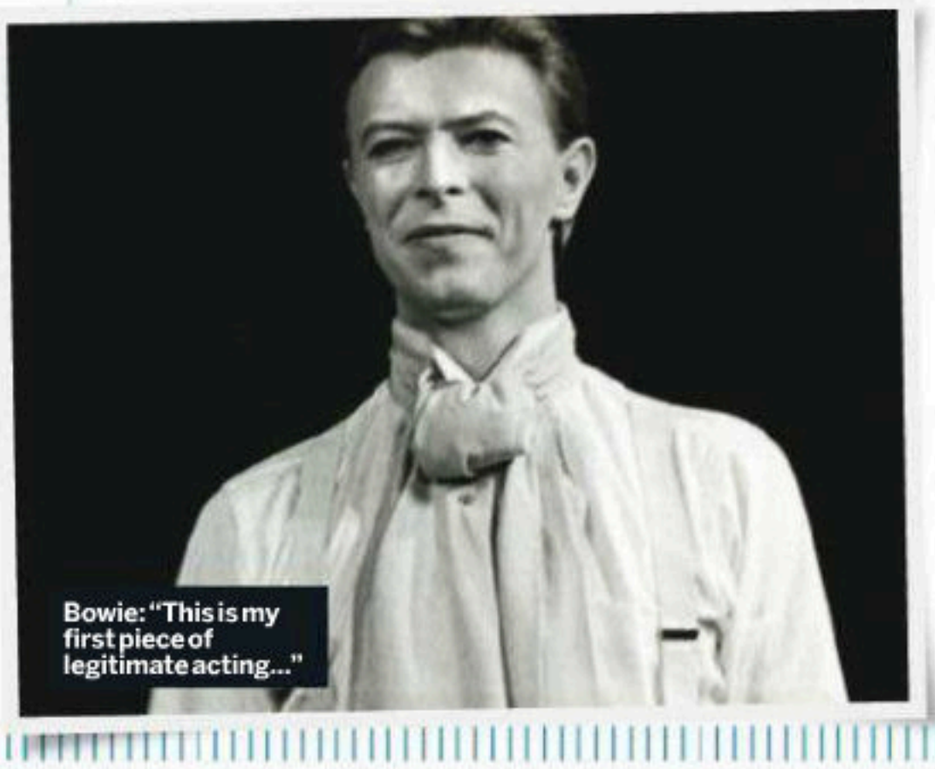
His good eye fixes me for an instant, he pulls deeply on his cigarette then, as if suddenly resigning himself to my presence and the obligations it entails, he replies with surprising hesitance: "The thing is, you see, that – well, the reason why I haven't given any interviews in recent years is simply because I've become, I think, very private. Also [*pause*] to be honest I really don't think I've got that much to say. But why don't we just start and see how it goes?"

I mumble assent and we begin. Bowie's earlier self-assurance seems to desert him occasionally during the 40-minute interview. If I ask him straightforward factual questions, he replies promptly enough. But if I touch on more sensitive areas, he becomes extremely evasive. He'll either, infuriatingly, agree with everything I've said, divulge so much (not much) before deciding some psychological Rubicon is about to be crossed and changing the subject, or simply answer me with a question of his own.

Bowie laughs frequently, sometimes because he's amused, but more often because he's only too well familiar with what Ian McDonald describes to me as the "double vector" of our conversation. In other words, Bowie laughs whenever it occurs to him that he's said or admitted something in a private encounter that is being recorded for public consumption. It's as if with this reflex reaction he can somehow shrug off the momentary anxiety he feels at having, perhaps, given too much away.

Talking with Bowie makes me more than usually aware of the manifold absurdities inherent in the interview process. Why should Bowie tell me anything at all? He has little to gain and so much to lose by doing so. We're total strangers compelled by our respective positions and professions to confront each other for a ludicrously short time. For all Bowie knows I might just want to run for home and then tear him limb from limb in print. Mutual confidence and trust are understandably not easily won in such situations.

But if Bowie does worry on this score, he needn't. I make a conscious effort to steel myself against his gushing charm, an attribute he can and indeed does call on at will with both men and the small crowds of the merely curious and fanatically adoring that greet him every night at the Blackstone's stage door, but I still find myself liking the man; he's in fact surprisingly sympat.



Bowie: "This is my first piece of legitimate acting..."

"I HAVEN'T GIVEN INTERVIEWS RECENTLY BECAUSE I'VE BECOME VERY, VERY PRIVATE. AND I DON'T THINK I HAVE MUCH TO SAY..."

Although one of the most profoundly amoral people I've met, Bowie is nonetheless hamstrung by an acuity of self-awareness that constantly threatens to bemuse or even overwhelm him, I really don't think he likes himself very much at times – and Bowie is extraordinarily introspective. His hyperactive mind resembles an entropic vortex that pulls a bewildering succession of variety of ideas, interests and influences into its orbit, arranging and then disarranging them at light speed. Concentration on any one thing for any length of time must pose him problems.

Bowie is also, or so it seems, painfully insecure. This is not something he flaunts in the hope of earning sympathy, but more of a compulsion. What he calls his "old re-examination programme" evidently entails continual reassessment and often comprehensive rewriting of his past; an intensive form of self-therapy which in turn forces him to be forever redefining the motivations and behaviour of the various characters he has created and whose mantles he has adopted.

In this respect, Joseph Merrick is no exception to the rule. The sheer pathos of the Elephant Man's existence obviously entrances Bowie and so Merrick – or rather elements of what Bowie perceives Merrick to be – will undoubtedly merge imperceptibly in the man's mind with all the other self-analytical data already accumulated there by the likes of Ziggy. To that extent, nothing's changed. Bowie always has and probably always will 'blame' his characters for his own more irresponsible or, in his view, otherwise hapless identification with what are really no more than sub-personalities of himself, and this will presumably continue to provide Bowie with some very necessary degree of solace.

It is of course something that most of us periodically catch ourselves at, but Bowie's past insistence on giving such characters concrete form by shining them through the distorting prism of the image-obsessed rock medium has meant that he's developed the faculty to an extreme degree, and thereby totally bamboozled himself in the process. In fact Bowie has externalised so much of himself so often that he seems virtually incapable of confronting fundamentals. When I eventually ask him why he thinks people continue to find him interesting, he backs off with an immediate disclaimer that he'd never even try to answer such a question. Small wonder then that he finds it so hard – and yet so absorbing – to make mental ends meet.

A 'weak' person in the pejorative sense of the term Bowie most certainly isn't, though – a more wilful individual I can't imagine. But given the complexities of his mercurial temperament – this is a dark, deep pool from which I will draw no more than a glassful or two in the hour and a half I spend with him in Chicago – it becomes almost superfluous to have to point out how inconsistent he is and how often he bluntly contradicts himself.

Which doesn't mean that nothing Bowie says can ever be taken at face value – far from it – but merely that it's never any more or any less than what happens to cross his mind at a particular moment. The point's been made on every occasion Bowie's given a substantial interview, but its validity has, I'm convinced, increased rather than decreased with time – as, I feel, has Bowie's pronounced ability to phrase what he says in such a way as to disarm his interviewer; he's uncannily adept at telling you exactly what he thinks you want to hear.

So much for psychoanalysis – when it's all dripped and dried Bowie must speak for himself.

***NME*: How did you come to play the part of Merrick?**

BOWIE: Very simply. I saw the CONTINUES OVER»

play just after Christmas, I wanted to see it on off-Broadway before it got all glossed up, but I wasn't in America at the time. So I saw the thing, liked it as a piece of writing and for myself I thought I would have loved to have had the part if it had been offered me – but it hadn't been.

And that was the last I thought about it until February of this year when I was back in New York recording the *Scary Monsters* thing. Jack Hofsiss, the director, approached me and asked me if I would consider taking over the role at the end of the year [*on Broadway*].

I wasn't sure if I liked the idea. I wondered if he'd seen me perform or if he knew anything about me. But then he told me about my concerts and things, so he had indeed seen me – or if not then he had a great scriptwriter. I thought that as long as he directed me I'd be quite willing to take the chance. It's the first piece of legitimate acting I've ever done per se. So I thought I might as well. It's a very complex and difficult role, but if I was going to jump in anywhere, I might as well jump there.

Did you know anything about the Elephant Man himself before you saw the play?
Sure. A lot of those strange freak stories appealed to me in my teens and then stayed with me – everything from hairy women (laughs) to people with 15 lips. I read all that stuff avidly and of course, I did my homework on Merrick.

It must have been a rather unsettling experience for you. The last time you encountered audiences as closely as you do here must have been back in the Ziggy days.
Yes, it makes one suddenly very aware of how one's body and one's facial expressions function. It's – you do feel you're being scrutinised to an unbearable extent. It's not that pleasurable actually.

But I think that was the first thing I had to fight. After we'd finished the rehearsals and opened in Denver I was furious with myself on the first night that the thing that was preoccupying me during the performance was how people were adjusting or relating to my body movements and that I hadn't been considering the character at all. It took a good week to shake that feeling off and become interested and involved onstage with Merrick.

And you have to imply all that at once. It's a terrible burden.

What about the physical aspects of the role – the walk, the way you have to speak out of the side of your mouth, and so on?
I didn't find that a problem at all. I went back into mime training during rehearsal and I had to use the pre-imposed exercises before and after performances to get myself into and out of it. One's spine can be damaged very badly. I had one night of excruciating pain when I didn't do the exercises. I've been to a chiropractor every now and then just to check I'm not putting my spine out of place. It's quite possibly to do that, especially if you sit down in that position. You hear a click and you think that's it. That was also quite frightening for the first week, but you learn just how much pressure to use and when to lay back a bit.

You must have explored the character in some depth by now. Merrick mirrors people; they all have their own preconceptions about him.
"We polish him so that he may better reflect ourselves," as it's later stated.

Yes, and that struck me as a role you might possibly relish.
It's certainly one in which I can see strong parallels with other kinds of folk that I've tried to develop. Yes [*insistently*], after you – you had a line of thought there.

I've lost it…
[*Laughs*] OK, we'll backtrack a bit. Yeah, studying Merrick. On a pedestrian level the first thing I did when I was told I actually had the part a couple of weeks before rehearsals started…

It was a very fast move. I had to make up my mind immediately I was told, so fortunately it didn't give me time to get cold feet. I think if I'd had a couple of months to think about the part I would have definitely got cold feet – over little things like could I project that far in a theatre without a microphone, stuff and nonsense like that. When it comes to the crunch those things are really important.

But I didn't have the chance; I had to say yes or no within 24 hours. I think they knew that as well. I think that Hofsiss knew that if I'd had time to think about it I would have dropped out. He was very clever psychologically in forcing me to face an issue like that.

So presumably you'd finished working on *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* by this time?
Yes, I was biding my time and was quite set to go back to the East or something. Then Hofsiss came to see me…

So anyway the first thing I did was to go to the London Hospital and see what's left there. The real letdown was seeing the bloody church, which he built. The real thing he made – in fact he gave it to Mrs Kendal [*the celebrated Victorian stage actress and theatre manager, and a character in the play*] and she donated it back to the hospital – was a penny plain and tuppence coloured thing that the nurses actually cut out for him; all he did was bend it up and stick it down. I was really disappointed that it wasn't a little wooden structure that he had patiently and tenderly carved by hand.

But that liberty in the play is justified, isn't it?
Oh yes, since one has to see that the purity Merrick was developing is evidenced in real form by the church that he was building. It's a good idea to hang on to the old church as a symbol – and also of course his enraptured idea of what heaven was going to be like and that he would be saved.

There was no doubt about it in his mind. Even though God does these terrible things to man and sits back and waits for them to ask for forgiveness… despite that, Merrick was prepared to believe in heaven, because of Jesus, not so much because of God.

In fact Merrick's very like the central character in that Werner Herzog film *The Enigma Of Kaspar Hauser*. That particular part was played by someone called Bruno S whom Herzog just found on the streets and who demonstrated that same sort of 'newness' of mind. You know, like Merrick he has that capacity to swing between what seems to be the height of naivety and incredible, unnerving insight in the course of one remark. It's like Herzog really believes that children are it, that they understand much more than adults and that growing up and gaining experience just destroys the power and the subtleties of their thinking.

It's really such a used idea. I think it still captures the public's imagination now for the same reasons that the original Elephant Man captured the Victorians' attention – because

Send in the clown: the *Scary Monsters* cover shoot

WIREIMAGE

"ONSTAGE, YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE BEING SCRUTINISED TO AN UNBEARABLE EXTENT. NOT THAT PLEASURABLE, ACTUALLY"

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

During the recording of *Young Americans* at Sigma Studios in Philadelphia, a crowd of teenagers congregated outside the building and followed David from hotel to hotel. The group became known as the Sigma Kids, and on the last day of recording Bowie invited them all in to listen to the final cut of the album.

With *Elephant Man* co-star Concetta Tomei, who played Mrs Kendal

he looked funny. But what the play is actually doing is shoving that pure 'new' spirit into the middle of sordid society and then seeing what sort of juxtapositions you get.

You took the words out of my mouth. Thomas Jerome Newton is partly that corrupted innocent and partly – well, he's obviously the creation of a very high level of technology and he can use that same technology very efficiently when necessary. So he's charming, appealing and yet quite ruthless.
Yeah, he has this hi-tech emotional drive. He discards people and their values all the time. Actually though, it's a false illusion of purity and in that sense it's very Nic Roeg. Sorry, Nic, I love you but. There's such a corruptness in Nic's thought, one that [*pause*]…

That reached its zenith or nadir, depending on how you look at it, with *Bad Timing*.
I saw it, I saw it. Wait for the next one. He starts it off at Christmas on Haiti. It's about voodoo and if any of that crew come off that island alive I'd be very surprised. Nic is always presenting something that is none too clear but which seems superficially to be everything that one's first impressions would have it be.

You know, pure spirit comes to earth, and they fuck it up. In fact, it's nothing of the kind. There's this insidious lie going on throughout the film; Newton is a far better person at the end of the film than he was when he came down. He's actually found some sort of real emotional drive; he knows what it is to relate to people, and what the effects of all that on him are is secondary, When he first comes down, he doesn't give a shit about anybody.

I've always seen Roeg as something of a fatalist, and sometimes a pretty demonic one at that.
I find him more like Puck. I would far more work with Roeg than, say Mr Anger [*Kenneth Anger, director of Lucifer Rising and author of Hollywood Babylon*].

There is, you see, a great purity in Nic's own thought. It's convoluted, but it's there. There's an enormous struggle going on in his own mind. It's very tense; he asks himself why he wants to create things, to make films. He knows,though, that he's undertaking some great magic – I'm wary of saying spell, but it's some kind of ritual thing when he's making a film. I mean, knowing the man it's very hard to look at the film [*Bad Timing*] without going back and feeling involved with him again. It's such a personal film.

But talking about *The Man Who Fell To Earth* – I got the impression that Roeg had been very dictatorial with you, that he'd very much said that it was his film, that he had a very clear, definite idea of how he wanted you to appear in it, that he really didn't care whether you had any interesting ideas about filmmaking or not – those things could be discussed off the set but if anybody was going to channel them into the film it was going to be him.
Absolutely correct, all the way down to the line. There was no – no, very little essence of myself. I think the only freedom I was given was in choosing how this character would dress. That was it. That was the only thing I could claim at all, that I chose my wardrobe and that I put in again – I had to – that Japanese influence, something that I felt had something to do with my very weak analogy between spacemen or a spaceman and what Westerners regard the Orientals as: an archetype kind of concept.

But you say there was very little of you in the film, whereas I'd say that there was as much David Bowie or whoever as we're ever likely to see of you on film. I thought that you weren't only at times physically naked but at others metaphysically so as well.
Yes, I agree there too, strangely enough. There are a few directors who have the kind of discipline over actors that Nic has and who can't then pull more out of the actor by doing that.

In *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, CONTINUES OVER»

you were almost, as it were, non-acting, just sublimating yourself to what you call Roeg's discipline, whereas in *Just A Gigolo* you were obviously trying to act very hard and the results were abysmal, truly appalling...
Yeah, the film was a cack [*laughs loudly*], a real cack. Everybody who was involved in the film – when they meet each other now, they look away [*covers face with hands, laughs*].

Yes, it was one of those. Oh well, we've all got to do one and hopefully I've done mine now. I think the great failure on my part for becoming involved in that particular venture was my acceptance of the director [*David Hemmings*] as a person rather than actually bothering about what the script consisted of – or rather didn't consist of, since it contained absolutely nothing – and also what experience the guy had had as a director.

I love Hemmings. He's a terrific fella, and I fell for that. He's wonderful and a great talker [*laughs*]. Listen – you were disappointed and you weren't even in it. Imagine how we felt.

Really, it was such a shame. I can only say that David and I are still great friends and we know what we did. We'll never work together again. Friendship was saved, if nothing else.

Fortunately it's been so long now that I don't feel so uptight when I talk about it, but the first year or so after I'd made the thing I was furious, mainly with myself. I mean, oh God, I really should have known better. Every real, legitimate actor I've ever met has told me never to even approach a film unless you know the script is good. If the script isn't any good, then there's no way a film is going to be good.

Back a bit – what about the music you wrote for *The Man Who Fell To Earth*?
Well only one piece survived and became "Subterraneans" on *Low*. I really can't remember the details, but there was a great row – not between Nic and I because we kept apart from those areas: I didn't want to row with Nic. It was a production row I had with British Lion, a couple of er, unusual people who were putting the thing together.

I was under the impression that I was going to be writing the music for the film but, when I'd finished five or six pieces, I was then told that if I would care to submit my music along with other people's... and I just said, "Shit, you're not getting any of it". I was so furious, I'd put so much into it.

Actually though, it was probably as well; my music would have cast a completely different reflection on it all. It turned out for the better and of course it did prompt me in another area – to consider my own instrumental capabilities, which I hadn't really done very seriously before. The area was one that was suddenly exciting me, one that I never really considered would. And that's when I got the first inklings of trying to work with Eno at some point.

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

The album sleeve for the original vinyl of *Scary Monsters...*, with photos by Brian Duffy and paintings by Edward Bell, featured whitewashed images from the covers of *Low*, *"Heroes"*, and a composite of Bowie's torso taken from *Lodger* and *Aladdin Sane*. The 1992 Rykodisc CD release omitted these images

I had the impression that several of the songs on *Station To Station* were quite strongly linked lyrically to *The Man Who Fell To Earth*: "TVC 15" and "Word On A Wing", for instance, and also but more indirectly "Wild As The Wind" and "Golden Years".
"Word On A Wing" I can talk about. There were days of such psychological terror when making the Roeg film that I nearly started to approach my reborn, born again thing.

It was the first time I'd really seriously thought about Christ and God in any depth and "Word On A Wing" was a protection. It did come as a complete revolt against elements that I found in the film. The passion in the song was genuine. It was also around that time that I started thinking about wearing this [*fingers small silver cross hanging on his chest*] again, which is now almost a leftover from that period.

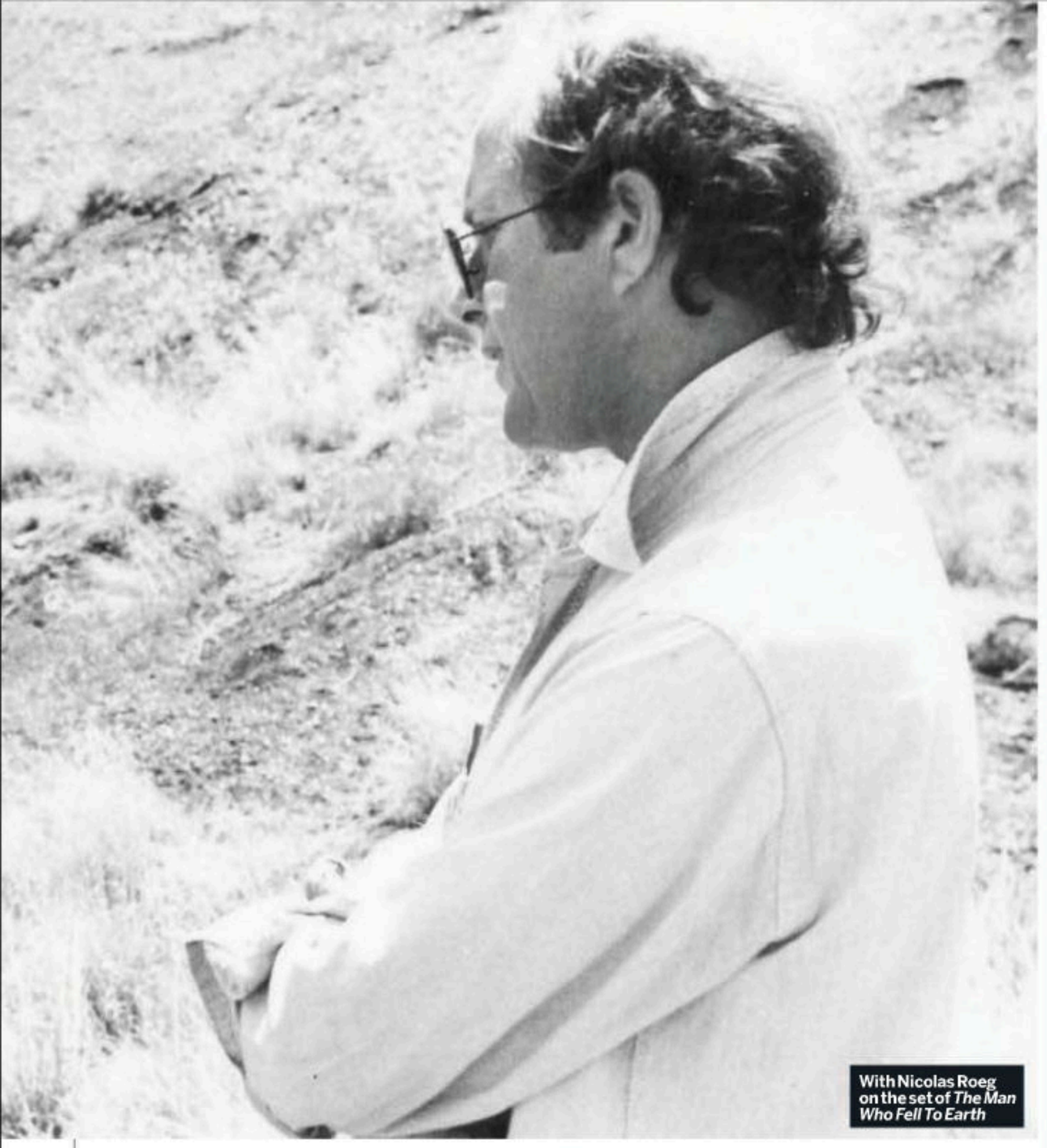
I wear it, but I'm not sure why I wear it now even. But at the time I really needed this. Hmmm [*laughs*], we're getting into heavy waters... but yes, the song was something I needed to produce from within to safeguard myself against some of the situations I felt were happening on the film set.

At the end of my review of *Lodger* I said rather flippantly that I thought you were ripe and ready for religion. That album seemed so desperate, so disparate, just a snapshot collage of journeyman melancholy; God seemed to be just about all you had left.
[*Laughs*] Yes, I can understand that, but I think you were probably post-period there. It had already hit me. There was a point when I very nearly got suckered into that narrow sort of looking – no, finding the Cross as the salvation of mankind around the Roeg period. That whole period stretching through to '76 was probably the worst year or year and a half of my life in the old re-examination programme.

I imagine Berlin must have knocked a lot of that stuffing out of you.
Oh yeah, it was best thing that could have happened to me. I'd come out of the American thing with [*pause, sigh*] smashed ideals inasmuch as I'd found that the ideals I did have weren't worth a shit anyway, that I was too willing to jump from point of view to point of view without taking into account the consequences of anything I was doing, just breaking out of the American cocoon. And so yes, Berlin was definitely the best place I could have gone.

At least *Low* and *"Heroes"* both had a certain emotional consistency, although it was sometimes a very distraught, withdrawn and perhaps cynical one. At least you were – well, looking at things again, or maybe for the first time, as opposed to just staring at images or reflections.
Yeah, looking at things, but with not that much conviction about whether I'm right or wrong

RONALD GRANT ARCHIVE



With Nicolas Roeg on the set of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*

about what I'm seeing. I think those three albums helped me to appreciate that my make-up is generally much more of a microcosm of what society is than me standing back and saying "This is what society it about".

Before, up until the '76 period, I was far more of the opinion that I had some kind of definite viewpoint on how society was made up and what it represented. But now I'm feeling like a society in myself, so broken up and fragmented that it's best just to throw me into the [*pause*]…

Into the ring? But isn't all that just the belated arrival of some sort of maturity, some realisation that you were fallible?

It was. To use a cliché – and why not? – it was… some kind of maturity.

Which brings us to your rather extraordinary means of arrival at Victoria Station in late '75. I was very perturbed by that, the black Mercedes, the handsome blond outriders and everything. I was there [at which point Bowie laughs briefly, as if embarrassed] and I came away thinking you were some sort of fascist maniac. The incident has never been very satisfactorily explained; I just thought you must have consumed an enormous amount of cocaine in LA [*Bowie chuckles broadly*]. I mean, that *Rolling Stone* interview with the bodies falling past the window, and then seeing the *Cracked Actor* television film of the Diamond Dogs tour at around the same time – it all convinced me and a lot of other people that you'd flipped completely, wanted to take over the world or had some equally idiotic, megalomaniac gameplan.

[*Still laughing*] No, I'm sure none of that helped in the least.

So what were you up to then?

Well actually, Victoria Station [*long pause*), now this you're not going to believe, but everything else you're saying is absolutely correct. I had indeed been bombed out for quite a long time. This was all an escape plan heralded by a couple of friends of mine – I won't say who they are – who helped me get out of America and back to Europe, whatever. That whole Station To Station tour was done under duress. I was out of my mind totally, completely crazed. Really. But the main thing I was functioning on was – as far as that whole thing about Hitler and rightism was concerned – it was mythology.

I was in the depths of mythology. I had found King Arthur. It was not as you probably know because… I mean, this whole racist thing, which came up quite inevitably and rightly. But – and I know this sounds terribly naïve – but none of that had actually occurred to me, inasmuch as I'd been working and still do work with black musicians for the last six or seven years. And we'd all talk about it together – about the Arthurian period, about the magical side of the whole Nazi campaign, and about the mythology involved.

All that stuff was flying around, buzzing around the skies. I could see it. Everywhere I looked there were these great demons of the past, demons of the future on the battlegrounds of one's emotional plane and all that… I was in a haze of mythology. Mixed up too of course were my own fucking characters. The Thin White Duke – throwing him, it was like kicking him. There was such an addictive thing about what was happening there that actually being able to send a lot of those demons back to their – well, wherever it is they live. Altogether, none of it is something to be dealt with unless you're in a particularly stable frame of mind.

Yes, the temptations to draw all the wrong conclusions are too great. But you can always notice these things surfacing into the cultural mainstream. I mean, the number of books you'll find in the 'Occult' racks of, say, WH Smith's these days about the Third Reich and its supposed occultist tendencies.

Oh God yes, I know it all… ghastly stuff.

Yes, and there's more and more of it now. They're even writing pulp novels on the subject, that connection between Arthurian literature and legend and the Reich. There's James Herbert's *The Spear* and Duncan Kyle's *Black Camelot*: the SS and their Grail castles, very subversive and dangerous material…

Yes, I know. Only too well. It's so insidious – and of course the first thing that happened to me when I got to Berlin was that I really had to face up to it, because all the people I had as friends there were naturally extreme leftists.

Suddenly I was in a situation where I was meeting young people of my age whose fathers had actually been SS men. That was a good way to be woken up out of that particular dilemma, and start to re-function in a more orderly fashion – not totally ordered, but you know… yeah, I came crashing down to earth when I go back to Europe.

And Los Angeles, that's where it all had happened. The fucking place should be wiped off the face of the earth. To be anything to do with rock'n'roll and to go and live in Los Angeles is I think just heading for disaster. It really is. Even Brian [Eno], who's so adaptable and quite as versatile as I now am at living in strange and foreign environments, he couldn't last there more than six weeks. He had to get out. But he was very

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"IN 1976, I WAS OUT OF MY MIND. REALLY. I WAS IN THE DEPTHS OF MYTHOLOGY. I HAD FOUND KING ARTHUR..."

clever – he got out much earlier than I did.

Alright, so we have this sort of manic destabilisation in LA and then re-adjustment in Berlin, up to a point at least. But there again at the end of "Red Money" on *Lodger* there's that line about "responsibility, it's up to you and me" – whereas in "Up The Hill Backwards" on the new album there's more than a suggestion of admitting defeat, or if not that then implying that there's bugger all you or I or anybody can do about the state of things.
Well… admitting it? I don't actually agree with that viewpoint, you see. To digress completely for a moment – I still adopt the viewpoint that music itself carries its own message, instrumentally I mean. Lyrics are not needed because music does have an implicit message of its own; it makes its case very pointedly. If that were not the case, then classical music would not have succeeded to the extent that it did in implying and carrying some definite point of view, some attitude, which presumably can't be expressed with words.

That's why I'm furious you didn't get to hear the album, because the lyrics taken on their own are nothing without the secondary sub-text of what the musical arrangement has to say, which is so important in a piece of popular music. It makes me so angry that people concentrate only on the lyrics because that's to imply there is no message stated in the music itself, which wipes out hundreds of years of classical music. Ridiculous.

If that's the case then I suppose I'd better concentrate on what I've heard and seen. The "Ashes To Ashes" video is very striking. Did David Mallett [*who made the three Lodger videos*] direct that?
That's my first direction. Well, no, I'll cross with him there. The other three that were done for *Lodger* were co-directions inasmuch as I gave David complete control over what I wanted put in there. But this one I storyboarded myself, actually drew it frame for frame. He edited it exactly as I wanted it and had allowed me to say [*adopts Edward Heath voice*] publicly that it is my first direction. I've always wanted to direct and this is a great chance to start – to get some money from a record company and then go away and sort of play with it.

Those recurring images of the astronaut, they're very reminiscent of HR Giger's sets for Ridley Scott's *Alien* film.
Yes, they are, and intentionally so. It was supposed to be the archetypal 1980s ideal of the futurist colony that has been founded by the earthling, of what looks like – and in that particular sequence the idea was for the earthling to be pumping out himself and to be having pumped into him something organic. So there was a very strong Giger influence there: the organic meets high-tech.

There's an awful lot of clichéd things in the video but I think I put them together in such a way that the whole thing isn't clichéd – at least inasmuch as the general drive of the sensibility that comes over is some feeling of nostalgia for a future. I've always been hung up on that it creeps into everything I do, however far away I try to get from it. It does recur and it's something I have to admit to and I can't… and that's obviously part of what I'm all about as an artist [*this said with uncharacteristic assertion*].

Now I tend to go with it rather than escape from it because it's obviously an area that, even if I refuse to face it, does interest me. The idea of having seen the future, of somewhere we've already been, keeps coming back to me.

Do you extend that to believing in the possibility of cyclic civilisations?
No, not on that kind of simplistic level. I don't… I think I work even more these days from dream sequences.

But then surely you're acknowledging come sort of wellspring of the collective unconscious? It's hard to think straight about this kind of thing – I mean, is it all down to *2001*-type interface? You know: they came from other worlds to give us knowledge and so on.
[*With sudden enthusiasm*] Have you ever read a book called *The Origins of Consciousness In The Dawn Of The Bi-Cameral Mind*? It sounds an awful title but it's really a very easy book to read. In fact, it's an extraordinary book written by a guy called JP Jaynes, which suggests that at one point the mind was definitely of a schizoid – no, a dual – nature and that the right hand passed messages through to the left side of the brain, and vice versa. It's written in a very academic manner but it's highly interesting. [*Jaynes' book is actually titled: The Origin Of Consciousness In The Breakdown Of The Bicameral Mind.*] I related to that tremendously because I've often had that feeling very strongly with myself that… well, it's like what Dylan said about the tunes are just in the air. I still believe in that kind of naïve approach to writing. I leave the cerebral stuff to the Enos and Fripps of this world. Because I'm far more tactile in my approach to what I do, I think it's probably why we work together so well.

We could go off at a tangent and talk about the vagaries of human intelligence for hours, but it doesn't look as if we've got the time. But thinking about Eno and Fripp – I used to like most of what they did on their own records a lot, but now have my doubts about all this endless conceptualising. I just don't think it ultimately delivers in most cases; Fripp's *God Save The Queen/Under Heavy Manners* album struck me as a prime example – some of its theory was fascinating, but much of its practice, of what actually appeared on the album was unremittingly dull. The same, I felt, went for Eno's *Music For Airports*.
I must say I like working with Brian a lot, but I think this happens to conceptualists; they often have the seeds and germs of truly revolutionary ways of doing things, which I believe Brian does.

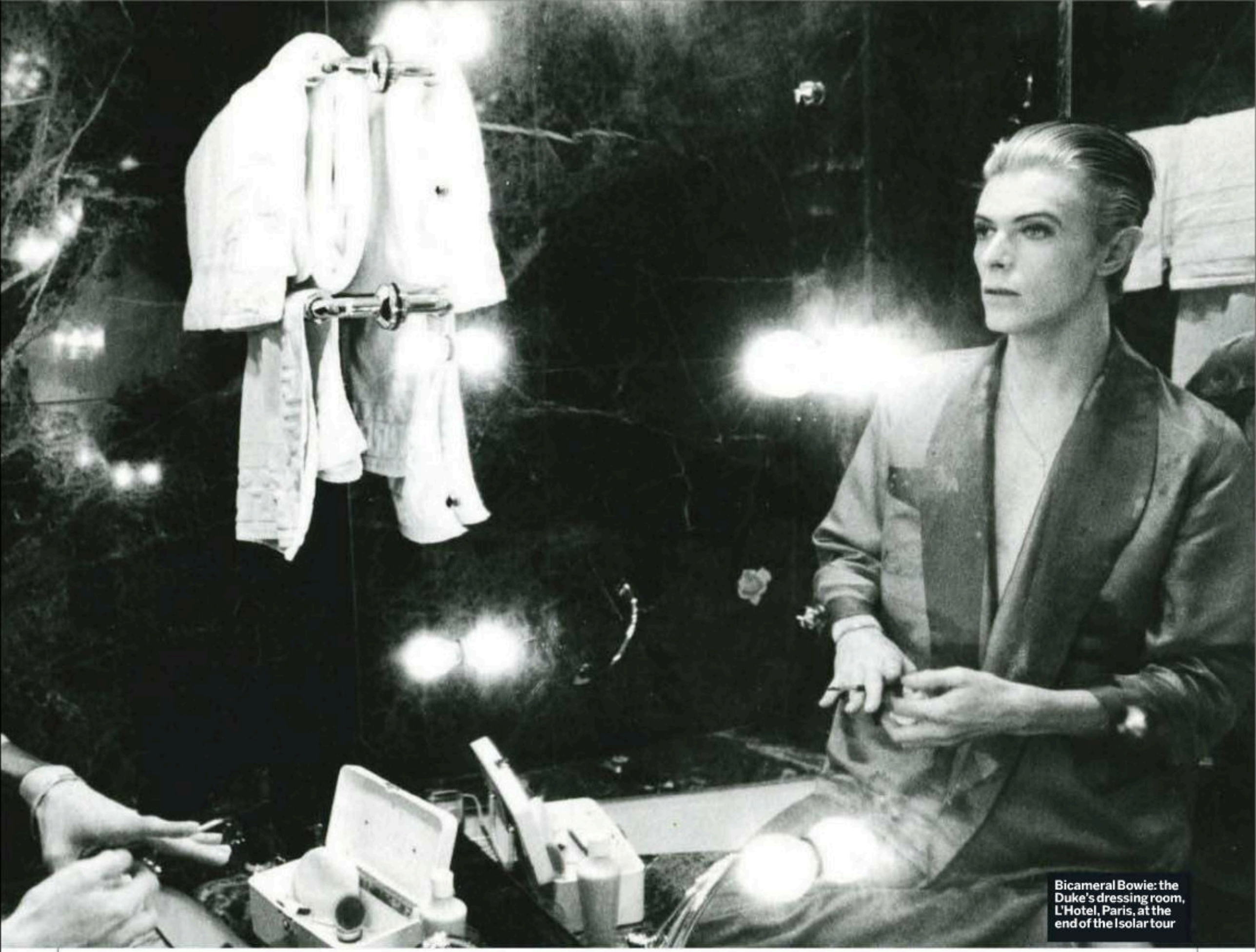
I really think he's one of the brightest minds I've met in this particular area, although of course he's duplicated many times over in this business and Brian is definitely one of them,

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Fashion! Turn to the left! The cover shot for 1973's *Pinups* – which featured Twiggy, and was taken by her boyfriend Justin De Villeneuve – was actually commissioned for the English edition of *Vogue*. Had Bowie not requisitioned the shot, it would have made him the first man to appear on *Vogue*'s cover.

ANDREW KENT

"IT MAKES ME SO ANGRY THAT PEOPLE CONCENTRATE ON LYRICS. IT IMPLIES THERE'S NO MESSAGE IN THE MUSIC ITSELF"



Bicameral Bowie: the Duke's dressing room, L'Hotel, Paris, at the end of the Isolar tour

and he has moments of true genius. I think some of the music on *Another Green World* was really, for want of a better word, transcendental. I dare say we'll be working together again.

Some more specific points – this question of Major Tom reappearing in "Ashes To Ashes"... he seems to be a fairly indestructible character. Why does he continue to interest you?

Again, the subtext of "Ashes To Ashes" is quite obviously the nursery rhyme appeal of it and for me it's a story of corruption. It's also about as subversive as one can get in popular music terms inasmuch as I would love to get a record played by the BBC containing the word "junkie". I thought that was quite successful [*grins*]. There's not much you can do these days; we're all such a blasé world-weary lot. [*Laughs*].

But if one can make anything more serious out of it all other than that it's The Further Stories Of, it's that when I originally wrote about Major Tom I was a very pragmatic and self-opinionated lad that thought I knew all about the great American dream and where it started and where it should stop. Here we had the great blast of American technological know-how shoving this guy up into space and once he gets there he's not quite sure why he's there. And that's where I left him. Now we've found out that he's under some kind of realisation that the whole process that got him up there had decayed, was born out of decay; it has decayed him and he's in the process of decaying. But he wishes to return to the nice, round womb, the earth, from whence he started.

I guess it's that simple. I really don't think there's anything more insidiously perverse about the thing at all. It really is an ode to childhood, if you like, a popular nursery rhyme. It's about spacemen becoming junkies [*laughs*].

What about the new, simpler version of "Space Oddity"?

That came about because Mallett wanted me to do something for his show and he wanted 'Space Oddity'. I agreed as long as I could do it again without all its trappings and do it strictly with three instruments. Having played it with just an acoustic guitar onstage early on I was always surprised at how powerful it was just as a song, without all the strings and synthesisers. In fact the video side of it was secondary; I really wanted to do it as a three-piece song.

Are you storyboarding the other two videos for *Scary Monsters*?

Oh yes, now I've started, no-one will stop me. Also another thing I've come up with over the last six months are my first stoned-out video tapes that I did in 1972 on black and white reel to reel, which are so exciting, and some later ones I did after Diamond Dogs [*the tour*].

In those I recreated the set for Diamond Dogs– this was in the Pierre Hotel in New York – and I built three or four-foot high buildings out of clay on tables. Some were standing up, others were crumbling and I took the camera and put a micro-lens on it, zooming down the streets in between the tables.

I tried animation out and had all these characters; the whole thing is so bizarre I'm going to put that together and put it out as a cassette. And as it's silent – there's a few bits of strange music on it but nothing much else; mainly I used the *Diamond Dogs* album as a backing track... You know, I wanted to make a film of *Diamond Dogs* so passionately, so badly; I really wanted to do that. I had the whole roller skating thing in there. We had no more cars because of the fuel problems – which was super stuff to look back on and say yes, I thought that then – and these characters with enormous, rusty, sort of organic-looking roller skates with squeaking wheels that they couldn't handle very well. Also I had groups of these cyborgy people wandering around looking so punky; it's going to be a lovely tape to put out. I want to write some new music though: a piece of music accompanied by a sort of strange black and white vision.

Because *Diamond Dogs* is certainly a retroactive sort of idea, one

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that seems to work much better after the event.
Now there's a certain quaintness in some of its arrangements that pieces it into the '70s as an artefact of the time.

Chopping and changing a bit, tell me about "Fashion" and the first part of "It's No Game", both of which I have heard.
The Japanese lyrics to the first "It's No Game" are exactly the same as the others, although "Part 1" sees a more sort of animal approach on my part. Also, repeating me parrot fashion but in Japanese is a young Japanese girl friend of mine who says the lyric in such a way as to give the lie to the whole very sexist idea of how Japanese girls are so very prim. She's like a Samurai the way she hammers it out. It's no longer the little Geisha girl kind of thing, which really pisses me off because they're just not like that at all.

And "Fashion"? You mention "*the goon squad*" – fascism?
No, not really. It's more to do with that dedication to fashion. I was trying to move on a little from that Ray Davies concept of fashion, to suggest more of a gritted teeth determination and an unsureness about why one's doing it. But one has to do it, rather like one goes to the dentist and he has the tooth drilled. I mean, you have to have it done, putting up with the fear and the aggravation. It's that kind of feeling about fashion, which seems to have in it now an element that's all too depressing.

But that's hardly surprising when so many kids are leaving school today and not being able to find jobs, is it? If that is the case, then you're going to make bloody sure you have a good time down the disco or wherever.
I don't know, you know. The American disco I went to in the early '70s in New York when it was supposed to be the hot new thing that was sweeping the city – well, I never felt that grim determination that one feels now. There is that. Yes, I must say I did feel it when I was in London. I was taken to one extraordinary place by... Steve Strange? God, what was it called? Everybody was in Victorian clothes. I suppose they were part of the new new wave or the permanent wave or whatever... [*Enter Coco making throat-slitting gestures*]... It's Valkyrie [*laughs*]. We'll have some more time but I'll have to keep it to a minimum.

As we finish, I protest to Bowie about this "minimum". I overstate my case to Bowie, and he suddenly snaps "Alright, alright, don't sell it to me, Angus. I don't need anybody to sell me anything." I retire in confusion and, convinced that I've aged years in less than an hour, make my exit.

Friday afternoon finds Anton and I awaiting Bowie and Coco in a small, seedy bar opposite the Blackstone. They arrive on time and Bowie, sharing Anton's delight at having found Sinatra's mildly heretical rendition of "That's What God's Face Looks Like" on the jukebox, agrees to the photographer's request to do a session there and then, but not without first consulting Coco.

The bar's proprietor, a Chicano with knife scars criss-crossing the left-hand side of his face and neck, looks on in amazement.

We move to the theatre and on a whim Bowie suggests we do the interview onstage, I agree and so we heave the table and chairs into position. The contrast with the claustrophobic dressing room couldn't be more complete. Whereas yesterday Bowie and I fenced tensely at each other, today we both seem much more at our ease. For my part, I've noted down some dozen simple, factual questions and, when these are dismissed, I plan to freewheel. Bowie seems positively expansive. It's as if we're both convinced we have the other's measure.

As it transpires, the interview's very informality belies the way it progresses. Much to my surprise, after initial evasions Bowie begins to discuss himself with very little prompting and answers off-the-cuff questions I'm quite prepared for him to ignore altogether. Or so it seems.

"I WANTED TO MAKE A FILM OF DIAMOND DOGS SO BADLY – I EVEN HAD THE ROLLER-SKATING THING IN THERE..."

On reflection it occurs to me that wondering whether or not Bowie is being as straightforward and forthcoming as he appears to be is pointless, just as to depict him as the archetypal manipulator-chameleon who invariably vanishes behind a verbal smokescreen of his own making is both fatuous and unfair. Suffice to say that, soon becoming quite oblivious to our surroundings, Bowie and I talk intensively for some 35 minutes.

If our conversation doesn't follow a very logical course, that's only because most conversations don't but, since this one had a peculiarly insistent flow, I've left it unedited, intact.

Why did you choose to do a Tom Verlaine song ("Kingdom Come") on the new album?
That particular cut, it was simply one of the most appealing on his album. I'd always wanted to work with him in some way or another, but I hadn't considered doing one of his songs. In fact, Carlos Alomar, my guitarist, suggested that we do a cover version of it since it was such a lovely song.

It's about the notion of grace. Did that influence you at all?
Yes and no. The song just happens to fit into the scattered scheme of things, that's all.

Why did you release two more versions of "John, I'm Only Dancing"?
Only because we dug them up and the beat version was something that never got on the *Young Americans* album. It seemed so right at the time and RCA wanted to put it out, and I agreed to it fully. It was just some more material that was held back there. I've still got lots of things canned like that, which I'd like to release, things like "White Light/White Heat" with the Spiders.

Do you have complete control over what RCA put out under your name?
Oh no, they've put out things without my approval. "Velvet Goldmine" is the one that immediately springs to mind. That whole thing came out without my having the chance to listen to the mix; somebody else had mixed it – an extraordinary move.

But haven't you recently re-negotiated your contract with RCA? Surely you can put a stop to that sort of thing?
No, I most certainly haven't. We're miles away from that and shall just have to see what happens.

There were rumours that RCA weren't very happy with *Lodger*.
That's true. They weren't very happy with *Low* either. At the time the one comment I received from them was "Can we get you another pad in Philadelphia?", so that I could do another *Young Americans*-type album.

Does that appeal to you, making another *Young Americans*-type album?
I don't know. You see, my own needs were satisfied within that area in the '73/'74 period, when I was staying as much as I possibly could there, crashing down with people in either Philadelphia or New York. I spent an awful lot of time in that kind of environment.

Leaping about a bit...
That's alright, I'm in the mood.

"Red Sails" from *Lodger* – was the Neu! influence there intentional?
Yes, definitely. That drum and guitar sound, that especially, is quite a dream. The moments of difference though, they came from Adrian [*Belew, Bowie's guitarist at the time*] not being played Neu!; he'd never heard of them. So I told him the atmosphere I wanted and he came up with the same conclusions that Neu! came up with, which was fine by me. That Neu! sound is fantastic.

You seemed at one time to have a fondness for using rather hysterical lead guitarists: Earl Slick, Ricky Gardiner and then Belew.
Well, that's a contrivance of my own. What I do is, say, use four tracks for a recorded solo and then I cut them up, knock up a little four-point mixer clipping the solos in and out. I give myself arbitrary numbers of bars in

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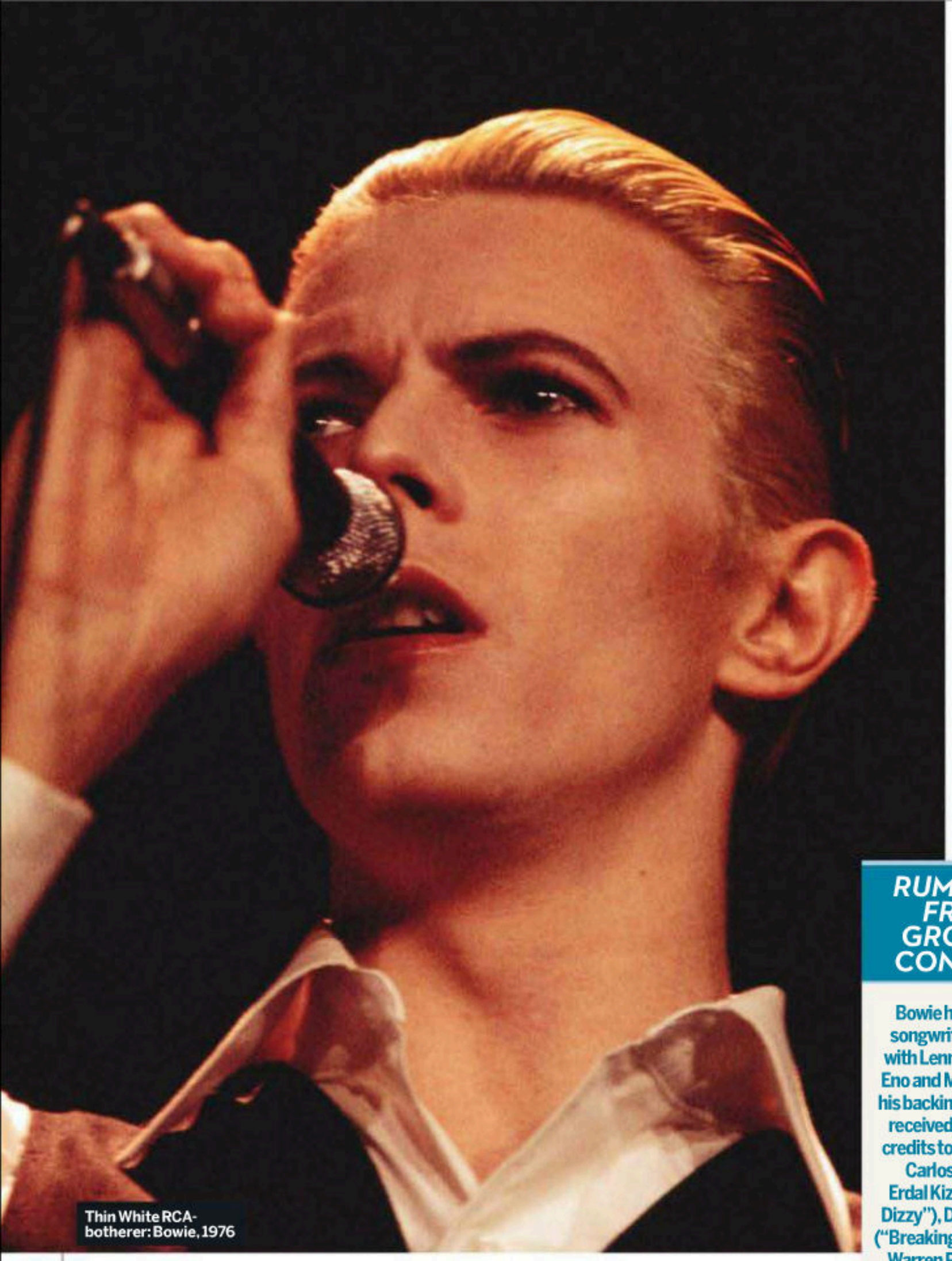

Thin White RCA-botherer: Bowie, 1976

which they can play within a particular area and go backwards and forwards from one track to another. So yes, the effect is somewhat histrionic.

Moving on again to "Teenage Wildlife" on *Scary Monsters*, is it addressed to anybody in particular?
I guess… no, if I had my kind of mythical younger brother, I think it might have been addressed to him. It's for somebody who's not mentally armed.

To cope with what?
The shell shock of actually trying to assert yourself in society and your newly found values… I guess the younger brother is my adolescent self.

And who are the "*midwives in history*" who put on "*their bloody robes*"?
[*Laughs*] I have my own personal bloody midwives. We all have them. Mine shall remain nameless. For the sake of the song they're symbolic; they're the ones who would not have you be fulfilled.

You still seem to be quite concerned with giving advice to younger people.
I think that more and more that advice is given to myself; I often play questions and answer time with myself, however momentarily. I don't seriously think I could offer anybody else any advice at all. It would be about as profound as [*chuckles*] Alfred E. Neuman [*Mad magazine's late cover artist and humourist*]. It's just not my thing, maaann.

Obvious questions which I suppose I'm obliged to ask – what do you think of Gary Numan and John Foxx and all the other little Diamond Dog clones?
I only have opinions on them because I've been asked about them; I never had any before. I've already been asked once about Numan over the last month.

Foxx – I think he gives himself a wider berth; I think there's more diversity in what he does and could do.

Numan? I really don't know. I think what he did – that element of "The Man Who Sold The World" and "Saviour Machine"-type things – I think he encapsulated that whole feeling excellently. He really did a good job on that kind of stereotype, but I think therein lies his own particular confinement. I don't know what he intends doing, but I think he has confined himself terrifically. But that's his problem isn't it? What Numan did he did excellently but in repetition, in the same information coming over again and again, once you're heard one piece…

It's that rather sterile vision of a kleen-machine future again.
But that's really so narrow. It's that false idea of hi-tech society and all that which is… doesn't exist. I don't think we're anywhere near that sort of society. It's an enormous myth that's been perpetuated unfortunately, I guess, by readings of what I've done in that rock area at least, and in the consumer area television has an awful lot to answer for with its fabrication of the computer-world myth.

Those lines from "Ashes To Ashes" spring to mind: "*I've never done good things/I've never done bad things/I've never done anything out of the blue*". You seem to be saying that you're not prepared to judge your own achievements. Do you feel any – how shall I put it? – guilt about having helped propagate the sort of delusions we're talking about?
Well, how did you define those three lines?

Like many of your lyrics, they're infuriatingly ambivalent [*at which Bowie grins*]. They could be referring to the Major Tom character specifically or – well, to put it another way, I can accept that in your career there has been more than a certain amount of calculation, which I think you've probably exploited in retrospect. That's to say you've claimed you planned A, B and C –
Yup.

[*Pause*] Whereas in fact you may well have planned D, E and Z. But it worked, and you've been very fortunate in that respect. I don't know, I tend to believe that more often than not people's morality is completely screwed when they assume positions of public prominence, and that audiences presume a lot, too much perhaps, of those in whom they invest so much commitment.
I agree [*pause*]…

So would you dissociate yourself from that statement?
[*Sigh*] No, not really. Those three particular tines represent a continuing, returning feeling of inadequacy over what I've done. [*Bowie absently traces a finger around his mouth the proceeds, choosing his words very carefully*] I have an awful lot of reservations about what I've done inasmuch as I don't feel much of it has any import at all. And then I have days when of course it all feels very important to me, that I've contributed an awful lot. But I'm not awfully happy with what I've done in the past actually.

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RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Bowie has shared songwriting duties with Lennon, Queen, Eno and Moroder, but his backing musicians received co-writing credits too, including Carlos Alomar, Erdal Kizilcay ("Too Dizzy"), Dennis Davis ("Breaking Glass") and Warren Peace – aka Geoff MacCormack – on "When You Rock'N' Roll With Me".

So what would you include among your positive achievements?
The idea that one doesn't have to exist purely on one defined set of ethics and values, that you can investigate other areas and other avenues of perception and try and apply them to everyday life. I think I've tried to do that. I think I've done that fairly successfully. At times, even if only on a theoretical level, I've managed that. As far as everyday life goes, I don't think so…

I have this great long chain with a ball of middle-classness at the end of it, which keeps holding me back and that I keep sort of trying to fight through. I keep trying to find the Duchamp in me, which is harder and harder to find [*laughs*].

Why should middle-classness be a problem? Isn't that kind of exaggerated class-consciousness a peculiarly English affliction?
Yes, of course, and class-consciousness is a very great wall of contention with me, always getting in my way.

What is it that you feel then, you should have 'suffered' more for your art or something?
Oh no, not at all. Not on that level. I just keep finding my vision gets blinkered and becomes narrowed all the time. I'm continually trying to open it up and break it down and do shattering things to it – and that's when it becomes dangerous, I suppose.

But don't you understand your own creative faculties any better now than when you started writing? Doesn't some at least of the critical attention you receive in the media help you in that respect?
I don't know, you see. There are a few magazines or newspapers or television programmes that will deal with me on the same level that your paper would, for instance. In the majority of the media – there I'm completely stifled. I have been for years. I have never been anything other than Ziggy Stardust for the media en masse.

And yet even that – well, it's a ghost of your own making. When you toured and recorded what became the *Stage* album, for example, the first part of the show was old songs, very old songs. I suppose I over-reacted, but I must admit I did feel a vague sense of betrayal.
Really?

Yes, because I'd been impressed by *Low* and *"Heroes"* at the time, although I feel differently about them now. But I just felt you were very consciously trying to recover your old audience again – a move that seemed to cancel out the validity of the newer material. Altogether I was naïve enough to think it was a bit of a cheap trick.
I think it was rather to do with two ideas that I felt strongly. One was that I actually wanted to play the Ziggy album from top to bottom, from bottom to top, one to nine, because I suddenly found it again an enjoyable piece of music to listen to, having not done it for quite a few years onstage. So there was pure personal enjoyment value in there.

On the other hand, I'm only too willing to admit to the number of people who come to see me to hear a lot of those old songs and without any hesitation I'm quite willing to play them. I will also play the things I'm doing currently. But I have absolutely no qualms about playing older things of mine that people like.

Do you have any plans to tour?
Yes, next spring. I say this every time and I hope it happens – I want to play smaller places. I think this, the play, has helped a lot; it encourages me to work in smaller environments.

At the same time Broadway is beckoning. After all, *Scary Monsters* can be used as a very convenient crutch. It's a new Bowie album and there hasn't been one for some time, therefore it will probably sell well enough with or without you touring. Are you or would you be tempted by the prospect of taking another part on the stage or perhaps another film lead?

> **"IN THE MAJORITY OF THE MEDIA I'M COMPLETELY STIFLED. FOR THEM, I HAVE NEVER BEEN ANYTHING OTHER THAN ZIGGY"**

At this time, as we talked yesterday about my 32 Elvis Presley movies contained in one. I wouldn't jump at the first thing that came along by any means. No, whatever it was, it would have to be a script that had the same kind of power as *Elephant Man*.

You give the impression that by becoming involved in the play and the part you've proved a lot to yourself.
Oh yes, I was well surprised that I was able to do this successfully. My confidence was at a very low ebb on opening night. I was terrified actually.

And you must have also proved to yourself that you can exist quite satisfactorily outside of the rock sphere –
I've been doing that for a long time [*laughs*], since '76 in fact.

Not so satisfactorily as now.
For me completely so… oh, but you mean on a public level?

Yes.
Ah well, maybe not then.

Obviously music continues to interest you, but you skim quite a bit across its surface – an African influence here, a Japanese influence there. Do you ever feel you're in danger of misrepresenting some of the cultures you're very fond of?
I don't think that by taking a Japanese or an African emblem or motif I try to represent them at all. I would have thought it was pretty transparent that it was me trying to relate to that particular culture; not in my wildest dreams would I think I was trying to represent them.

But relating to what end? To your own satisfaction?
Because I've been there. Because it was there, rather. It is no more than… it does get back onto the sketchpad basis for songs for me. Often. And I guess that *Lodger* was the sketchpad of all of them.

Do you feel you're too old to be writing rock songs anymore?
I don't know how much of it is rock anymore. Music then? I don't think I'm too old to be writing the music I write either. [*Laughs*] That was an extraordinary thing to say. I mean, good God, when was the last time I wrote a rock song? Can you remember? I'm damned if I can.

It depends. Place one of your recent albums against one of Van Halen's and we're obviously not talking about the same thing.
Well, there you are. I don't think I would try to revitalise the same area of energy and sensibilities that, say, Ziggy had. I wouldn't attempt that again, because I haven't got that same positivism within my make-up. I mean, the very juvenile sort of assertiveness and arrogance of that period. He said modestly [*laughs*]. I can't write young.

But you address yourself to the young – what about "Because You're Young" on *Monsters*?
I think repeatedly that having got a nine-year-old son that's an area where I can try and talk to an age group that I've been through.

Do you think any of your audience have grown with you, so to speak, all the way?
Not necessarily. My audience has diminished remarkably over the years.

Does that bother you?
No, not at all.

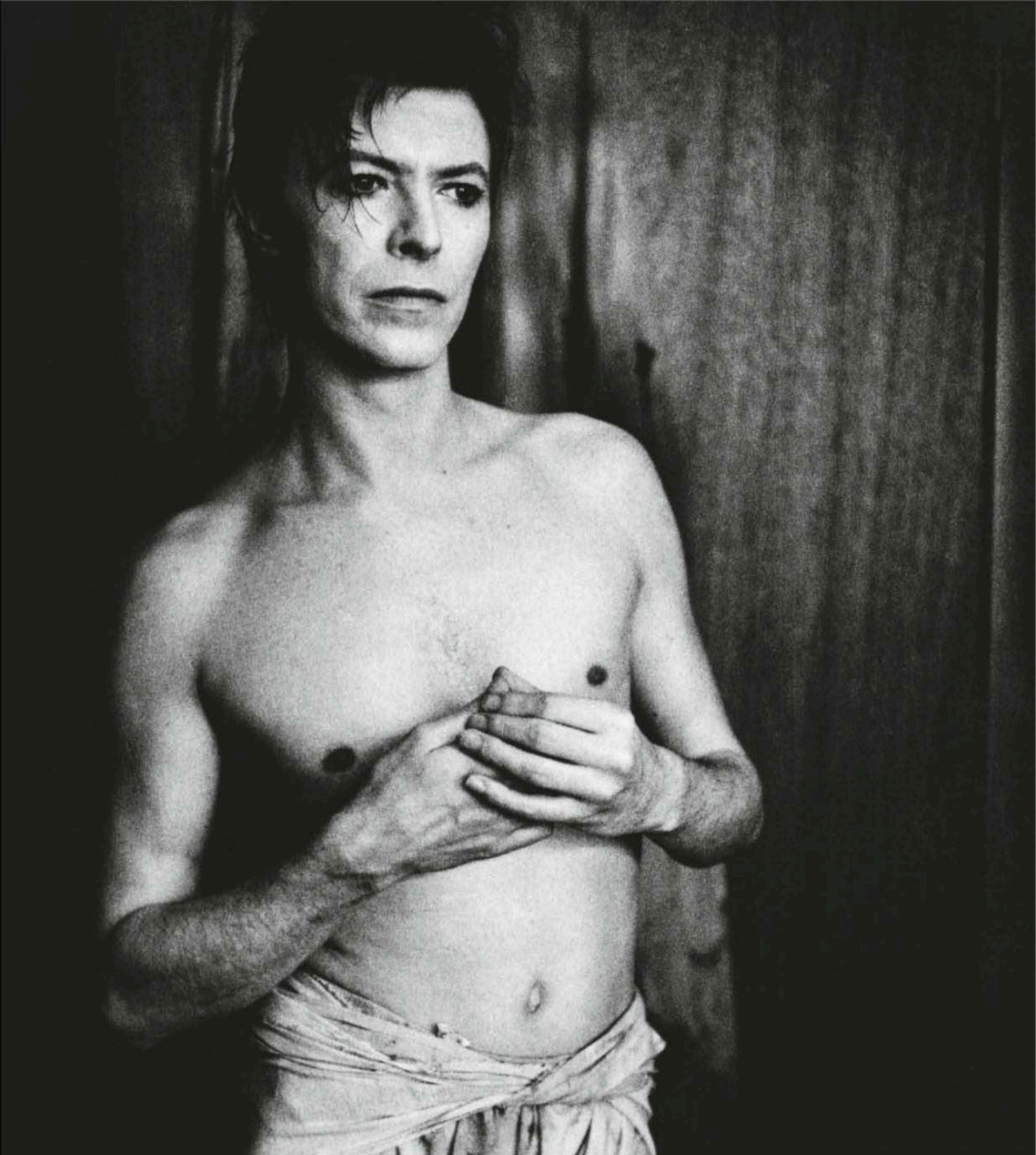
Does it bother you financially?
Yes it does. On those terms doing something like this is not something one does for the kind of money that rock'n'rollers can charge. And also of course I've never made any money on tours. Ever. Ever.

Why do you think people continue to find you interesting?
That's for you to answer. I'd never even try to answer that.

Because you don't want to?
Because I don't want to, and I don't want to because I can't. That's

CONTINUES OVER»

ANTON CORBIJN



something that I would really have no interest in trying to find out. I think I would far prefer to spend more time on finding out if I am still interesting to myself, if I still feel, if I still relate, if I still have any capacity for understanding where I am within the very tight, very small area of society that I physically live in.

That for me is more interesting. If I can then broadcast my own doubts through my pieces of music, however that's related to by any audience, that's quite honestly where the responsibility for me stops. I can do no more than write about how I feel about things or how I… what dubious kind of thoughts I have about where I am and what I've done.

Your saying all that makes you seem quite er, vulnerable, quite unsure of yourself. But can you draw up any sort of moral guidelines for your work? Do you feel that somebody like yourself who's exposed to public scrutiny has any kind of responsibility?

I don't think it's up to the one single person. It becomes a collective responsibility. Because, like it or not, whatever I do or say is going to be interpreted in a fair or unfair manner by disparate elements of the media.

So the responsibility is not more alone and I do have to consider what I should contribute and then hazard a guess at how it will be dealt with. As I say, I'm still referred to over here as the orange-haired bisexual. Now that is what I am here. Period. Zilch. There's nothing else.

After all [*laughs*], if ever there was a country of stereotypes and icons, this is the one. If you don't fall radically into some confinement or department, then they will stab away until they find something that is so superficially concrete that it will become the flag that they will wave.

Or the box to bury you in.

Absolutely. Far more so than in England or Europe generally. The other people who tend to do that, much as I like them, are the Japanese; they come up with –isms as well.

But there the process is in reverse, Japan having been actually and culturally invaded by America.

Oh sure, and of course there's a great anti-American thing here.

What is it that continues to fascinate you about Japan?

For me it's a physical representation – or I can read it in terms of that – of great new modern advances precariously balanced against an old kind of mythological way of thinking and being.

Does the outward theatricality of the old Japanese way of life appeal to you? I mean, like the Go player who lives his whole life by the rules of the game he becomes so expert and accomplished at as he grows older – the definition of that selfless sort of freedom being that the more you subordinate yourself to a particular discipline, the freer you are.

Oh yes, very much. It appeals to me on the surface but it's something that I felt would have a place in my life at one time. That kind of thing…

By which you mean what?

When I was flirting around with the idea of Buddhism, which was also a set of values and disciplines that have to be adhered to in a strict form. At that time I had some idea of my way, or my potential, with nature… and I wished to confine it. What does Merrick say about truths? That they're "restriction, governance and punishment" [*laughs*]. It's that self-flagellation element again in me…

Doesn't it also have something to do with the idea of the typically cultured but dissatisfied Western man feeling envious of the 'simple' truths of, say, a rigorous Eastern religion? Don't you feel that at all?

Yes, I do, I do. It's not infrequent that I wake up on a chilly morning and wish that I was in Kyoto or somewhere and in a Zen monastery. That feeling lasts for well over five or six minutes before I go and have a cigarette and a cup of coffee and [*laughs*] go for a walk round the block to shake that off. That idea of being controlled by an aesthetic set of values does recur with me.

I still have a pipedream that when I'm an old chap [*the 'p' deliberately over-stressed*] I shall go off to the Far East and smoke opium and go out in a sort of euphoric, cloudy bliss.

Would you be reincarnated?

I think I'd have to be [*laughs*] – many, many times.

What would you want to become?

What I might want to be and what I might become are two very different kettles of poisson [*laughs*]. Let's see, what would I want to be? Good God… well, it wouldn't be Lou Reed [*loud laughter all round*]. But… probably a rock'n'roll journalist.

Well, I wouldn't want to be David Bowie.

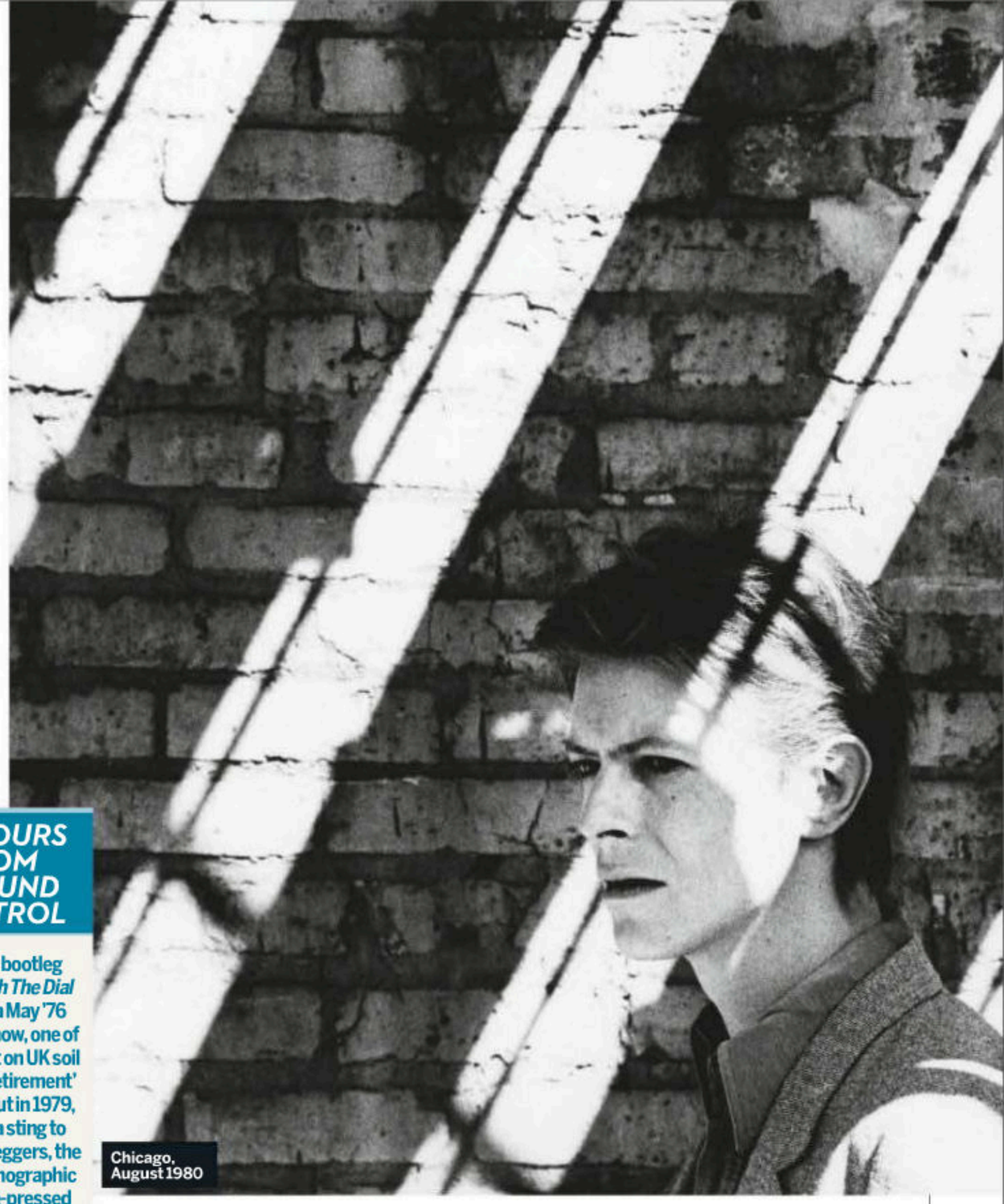
[*Laughing*] No, no-one's reincarnated as David Bowie. I'm quite positive of that.

Back to this middle-classness though – can you expand on what really bothers you about it?

I guess it restricts my thinking.

In what particular ways? Morally, aesthetically?

Aesthetically. Morally I've never had too



Chicago, August 1980

ANTON CORBIJN

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Japanese bootleg *Don't Touch The Dial* captured a May '76 Wembley show, one of Bowie's first on UK soil since the 'retirement' gig in '73. But in 1979, as part of a sting to catch bootleggers, the British Phonographic Institute re-pressed it as *The Wembley Wizard Touches The Dial*. The sting's name? Operation Moonbeam.

much. I sort of approach things in quite a barbarian fashion when it comes to morals. It's more to do with aesthetic values for my own writing. What I write is so inadequate.

Compared to what? The writing of people you admire?
Compared to a [*French novelist Jean*] Genet. Yeah, I do put myself against other writers and find my sensibilities thwarted and rather dulled and that… angers me.

Is it that you're annoyed because you're so busy filtering other influences that you feel you might actually not be expressing yourself at all? Or is it that you feel there's no essence that is David Bowie that can suddenly rush through? Maybe you think that people like Duchamp and Genet had some kind of incredible mainline that just thrust them forward regardless?
I think that I have a mainline, but I couldn't define it. Again, I wouldn't wish to; there's a danger in trying to define that one thing. There's also a particular spirit value that I find very difficult to articulate and I guess that's my… my mainline as you put it.

But it comes and goes, it hides, it gets lost and it reappears, rather like a stream that you come across when you're walking through a wood. You see it sometimes and it sparkles and then it disappears. And that makes me angry when it disappears [*here Bowie's tone becomes distant, abstracted, almost as if he's talking aloud to himself*]. And I should be happy about that because it's the natural way of things – but when it does disappear, which is known I think as a dry-up, then that is the most frustrating feeling of all.

I get a repetitive feeling that… [*Coco appears in the auditorium; Bowie suggests we talk another five or ten minutes*) that… come back, come back [*he gestures with his left hand, as if plucking something out of the air*].

Streams disappearing…
Yes, I get the repetitive feeling that it is – and this is somebody else's statement, I know – that the worst joke God can play is to make you an artist, but only a mediocre artist. And that happens, you get that kind of feeling. And one can get so despondent and melancholy and [*lowering his voice, almost choking the word out*] bellicose.

And, boy, do I get bellicose.

But can't someone in your privileged sort of position afford to indulge himself in a little breast-beating?
[*Astonished*] Do you really believe that?

No, of course not. You're just as entitled to be nagged by self-doubt as anyone else; it was a leading question.
Really though, I think the greatest problem comes in wondering why I think that any of what I write should be of any import to anybody. And that's something I find more and more – that my contribution isn't enough.

But that's a problem of your own making.
Oh, quite. That dissatisfaction, it's an old quandary that all writers come across all the time. It's certainly nothing new; it seems to follow the integral feelings of most writers.

Perhaps your uncertainty and self-doubt are in fact your leading edge?
It seems to be so. It seems to be my one focus. Uncertainty? Yes, if there's one thing I've contributed, it's a great dollop of uncertainty [*laughs*]. For better or worse.

There again, artistic certainty can be boring, as some would say it's been in Dylan's case since he 'found' God.
Although I must say I can see, I can feel exactly what brought that about.

Talking of other people who possessed a strength of purpose you find wanting in yourself, do you have any particular models? I don't necessarily mean in terms of their lifestyles.
No, I understand perfectly what you're saying. No, I think I'm very happy with the problems that I have in my own way of living. Day to day is very enjoyable for me and has been for a couple of years now, although I must admit that at one time my lifestyle was far over and above what anybody would sensibly inflict on themselves. But at the moment it's a rush, and it's really very enjoyable. Growing up with my son is one of the greatest enjoyments that I have.

But on an aesthetic level – no, no [*conclusively*], I'm quite happy with my lot as a writer. I would really be nervous if I didn't have the uncertainties and the problems that I do have. I would dread feeling that complacent.

"IF THERE'S ONE THING I HAVE CONTRIBUTED, IT'S A GREAT DOLLOP OF UNCERTAINTY. FOR BETTER OR WORSE"

But do specific media-related problems frustrate you? *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* was finished months ago and still isn't released. Does that kind of thing annoy you, that lack of immediacy in communicating to your audience?
Oh God, yes. That sort of thing is just horrendous. Obviously I've already got a backlog of stuff I want to record, which I guess I'll start doing just after Christmas. But I think it only becomes a drag for reasons of personal satisfaction, because the material isn't disposed of, swept out of the way so I can get on with something else.

But as far as the actual songs themselves are concerned, I don't think they're written with any particular timespan in mind. For me I don't think it would really matter whether they'd been released two years ago or two years forward. I think they're pieces of music I could listen to anytime. But I have to take that into consideration these days when I record something, as to whether or not I would want to listen to it again in a few years' time.

I try not to write as immediately as I once used to. There was a time when I was very keen to write songs that had a very definite edge to them, like all of *Diamond Dogs* comes over in a completely different light. It still had a validity, a strong one, but at the time and for a couple of years after, it felt as if it was firmly slotted into that particular period. I had a thing about trying to write every year about that year, but I've loosened up now, I think… [*Coco appears at the foot of the stage pointing at her watch*]. Got a last one?

Any message for the folks back home?
Oh God, don't you dare.

Only kidding.

After I've stopped the tape, Bowie and I surface as if from a deep trance. He asks if he can look at my copious but unused notes.

"It's a bloody thesis!" he exclaims.

"Well, what did you expect?"

"But don't you think I'm entitled to make similar preparations of my own?"

"Of course," I reply. "But it never happens that way, does it?"

"Shame really. I must say I wasn't looking forward to this at all, but have been pleasantly surprised at how it's gone."

Outside the theatre the inevitable limo arrives and, rather ridiculously, accelerates briskly away from the deserted sidewalk.

David Bowie is an intelligent, articulate and fascinating man who is still writing messages to himself and sealing them in bottles. It's an obsessively private process that for obvious reasons he offers up for public scrutiny. Whatever he may think or feel, Bowie had done both good things and bad things. He has also done a lot more of the blue than he may ever surmise.

Unsuspectingly I'm sure, Bowie positively leaks loneliness; it wraps itself around him like a clammy shroud. But the man is driven, and it's surely no accident that on *Scary Monsters*… he sings Tom Verlaine's "Kingdom Come" with such unguarded passion:

"Well I'll be breaking these rocks until the kingdom comes
And cuttin' this hay until the kingdom comes
Yes I'll be breaking these rocks until the kingdom comes
It's my price to pay until the kingdom comes."

Such is the alternately frustrating and rewarding lot of the long-distance creative person and such is David Bowie's typically reflective portrait of himself; the artist as a now not so young man. You must make of both whatever you will.

RELEASE DATE 12 | SEPTEMBER | 1980

SCARY MONSTERS (AND SUPER CREEPS)

A time to take stock, as Major Tom returns to a world of nightmares, and Bowie's mask starts to slip. *By John Robinson*

ALTHOUGH THE FIRST release from *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* was the "Ashes To Ashes" single in August 1980, David Bowie had in fact first greeted the new decade over eight months before. Then, on New Year's Eve, 1979, preceded by a sketch featuring a mad astronomer and a trio of scantily clad young women, he had appeared performing "Space Oddity" on *The Kenny Everett Television Show*. Assuming the role of Major Tom, Bowie performed the first couple of minutes of this new, stripped-down "Space Oddity" looking extremely uncomfortable in full-screen close-up, before putting down his guitar and moving to another set: a padded cell.

For all the novelty promised by a new decade, as he readied his new album and his contract with RCA drew to a close, Bowie found himself confronted by images of his past. In America, his new album was accompanied by a DJ promo album, *1980 All Clear*, that reprised 10 tracks from his previous albums, while later, as Christmas approached, a hits compilation *The Best Of Bowie* was readied for the shops. "Perhaps you didn't understand the last three albums," the message seemed to be, "but listen to all these other tunes."

A full 10 years and more into his mature career, it's perhaps no wonder that Bowie might allow himself a moment to take stock. How better to measure the effects of the past years on him than by revisiting a character shot into orbit filled with hope and a certain naïve expectation?

Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps) is an album that's witty, funky and funny. But for all its aggression – Bowie described it as "youth culture music" in 1983, citing its "bubbling synthesisers and unconventional erratic guitar playing" – its songs are full of narrators and commentators offering the benefit of their experience. What they've got to tell you might be consoling (the *"It'll be all right…"* of "Up The Hill Backwards") or might be pretty scary (*"They came down hard on the faggots,"* goes "Scream Like A Baby"). But it's up to you whether you listen to them or not.

At the very start of the album, a film projector whirs into life, and at its close, we hear the movie finishing and celluloid spooling onto the ground. *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*, as "It's No Game (Pt 2)" hints (*"Silhouettes and shadows/Watch the revolution…"*) is exactly as advertised: it's part current affairs, part video nasty. It has the power to give you nightmares, of course. But it could simply thrill you.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Bowie communicates with an honesty and directness that suggests informed pessimism can be more inspiring than any obtuse optimistic fantasy. The realist's David Bowie album."
CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY, NME, SEPTEMBER 20, 1980

"A Berlin Wall of sound, almost intimidating in its ferocity, but with sufficient softer interludes to introduce a mellow tinge…"
PATRICK HUMPHRIES, MELODY MAKER, SEPTEMBER 20, 1980

Certainly, a full complement of Bowies past and present have been arrayed to make this album as impressive as possible. The photographs on the mixed-media rear jacket of the album make the point explicit. The mangled torso of *Lodger*. The black and white cover of *"Heroes"*, and *The Man Who Fell To Earth* vintage shot from *Low*. Traditional wisdom holds that these former Bowie iterations have been displayed only to be painted over, discarded. In fact, it's far more in keeping with the Duffy/Edward Bell collage as it stands – and with the tone of *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* as a whole – if we think of them as having been pasted up as points of reference, as lessons to be learned from and incorporated.

After all, while this is a new Bowie album, a new town, it's not entirely a new Bowie. From the distorted count-in of the opening track "It's No Game (Part 1)", its loping, *"Heroes"* vintage groove and its mercurial Robert Fripp guitar runs, it's clear that not all the features of the Berlin landscape will be absent from this new record.

A glance at the credits also reveals other familiar names from milestones in Bowie's past. E Street Band pianist Roy Bittan, who had appeared on *Station To Station* returns. Producer Tony Visconti, who had helmed Bowie's most commercially successful albums, is again in the chair. *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* is not about change for change's own sake. It remains a work of accumulated wisdom and taste. Visconti recalled that during the production Bowie –

TRACKMARKS | Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)

1. It's No Game (Part 1) ★★★★
2. Up The Hill Backwards ★★★★
3. Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps) ★★★★
4. Ashes To Ashes ★★★★★
5. Fashion ★★★★★
6. Teenage Wildlife ★★★★
7. Scream Like A Baby ★★★★
8. Kingdom Come ★★★
9. Because You're Young ★★★★★
10. It's No Game (Part 2) ★★★★★

RELEASED: September 12, 1980
LABEL: RCA
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Tony Visconti
RECORDED AT: The Power Station, New York and Good Earth Studios, London
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, keyboards, backing vocals, saxophone); Dennis Davis (percussion); George Murray (bass); Carlos Alomar (guitars)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 12

rather than free-associating in the studio as he had with *Diamond Dogs* or *Station To Station* or *"Heroes"* for example – would sit at the piano and *compose* his songs. When he was uninspired, production was stopped, and resumed later.

A methodical approach, and one that seems consistent with the tone of the album as a whole. *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* begins with a track called "It's No Game (Part 1)", that finds a woman named Michi Hirota, declaiming lyrics in Japanese, while Bowie emotes, close to breaking point, behind them in English. What follows in the album, Bowie explained in a promotional radio interview at the time, is a process through which the listener – and he as a writer – work through "certain dilemmas". If this was the case, the process is hugely enjoyable, as we negotiate manipulative psycho-villains (the title track), pathological hipsters ("Fashion") and the prospect of romantic escape via the medium of Bruce Springsteen pastiche ("Teenage Wildlife").

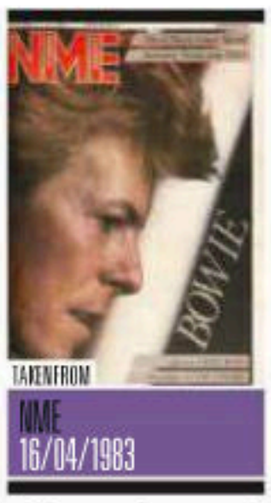
Most probingly, in "Ashes To Ashes" this process shows us Major Tom, a man who is older and wiser, but not happier for it. Shot into orbit in 1969 on a tide of technological idealism, by the time we meet him again 11 years later Major Tom has realised that he was not an adventurer, but just a tool in a propaganda war darker than space itself. Utterly bereft, he must lose himself in the numbness of a heroin-like addiction. In the video, Bowie, as Pierrot, led a bulldozer and a small band of acolytes including Steve Strange, through a solarised landscape of terrible sadness and desolation: Hastings.

By the time we arrive at "It's No Game (Part 2)", the arrangement of the reprised song suggests that the narrator has been changed utterly by the encounters with the freaks he's met along the way. He sounds like a careworn man who has seen his anger and energy dissipate into something a little more reflective and melancholic. He sounds, in fact, like Iggy Pop. "*Children all around the world*," he observes, tiredly, neither condemning, nor offering an explanation, "*Put camel shit on walls.*"

Who would stay long in such a vision? By the time we see Bowie as Pierrot again on the cover of *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*, his makeup is mostly off, and he's part-way out of his costume. Small wonder that when he emerged again in 1983, Bowie should have shed disguise entirely and emerged as something a bit more like himself – a fit and healthy superstar, with no baggage, bringing a simple invitation. To dance.

"THE MUSIC I'M WRITING NOW IS PROBABLY GOING TO REACH A NEWER AUDIENCE FOR ME..."

1983. A period of experimentation has ended, and yet another new Bowie is unveiled: the urbane father, interested in writing "obvious and simplistic" songs and, apparently "in touch with myself". Let's dance! says CHRIS BOHN.



TAKEN FROM
NME
16/04/1983

I: THE MISSING YEARS

David Bowie's new film, *The Hunger*, opens not with the focus fixed firmly on the star but with a cameo sequence of Bauhaus live in Heaven.

The song, archly enough, is "Bela Lugosi's Dead". The striking face is Peter Murphy's. The gestures are all David Bowie's.

A decade's tics, contortions and conceits, culminating prematurely with Thomas Newton's gun-toting passage from *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, are summarised in a matter of minutes. It's quite a performance but, alas, we don't get to hear how David Bowie feels about seeing his past flash before his eyes. His attention is elsewhere.

Playing John, a 200-year-old English gentleman companion to ageless vampire Catherine Deneuve, he's casing the Heavenly audience, not the group, for a suitable victim, a blood sacrifice to his eternal bloom.

Though this is fiction, the opening might have been wittily composed with its star in mind. David Bowie coming face to face with a fragment of his legacy and looking right past it at someone else.

Or, alternatively, the vampirical Bowie prowling the clubs in search of new talent, new ideas to play off against his own.

Bowie has always been the first to admit the bloodflow has never been one way. As is only proper in such an interdependent relationship, he has a right to take back what he has put in, even if this means withdrawing what amounts to his original deposit. But where can he look these days without seeing Ziggy's children mutated into resplendent or garish beings?

For every Bowie phase there is a movement in its wake. As he once quipped, he has launched whole schools of pretension singlehandedly. Even in his absence, then, David Bowie is somehow present.

It's been a long strange trip from *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* to *Let's Dance*, lasting two movies and three years, plugged by three bizarre single collaborations. There was Bowie and Brecht on the excellent five-song "Baal" EP featuring Bowie having a ball whooping through young Brecht at his lebenslustful best. "*Baal can spot the vultures in the stormy sky/As they wait up there to see if Baal will die/Sometimes Baal pretends he's dead, the vultures swoop/Baal in silence dines on vulture soup!*"; Bowie and Moroder on "Cat People", the overblown melodrama which makes perfect sense when heard over the closing credits of the film being both a description and sensual suggestion of *Cat People*'s barely contained sexuality; and finally, the oddest of them all. Bowie and Queen on "Under Pressure".

"Yes, I found that quite odd," smiles Bowie. "I'm not quite sure how I got involved in that really. They turned up in Montreux, which is not far from where I live in Switzerland. Needless to say when groups come to record, they find out where I live... So this is how I tend to see a lot of bands, ha ha, under the influence of Switzerland.

"So I just went down to the studio and we just started one of those inevitable jams, which lead to a skeleton of a song. I thought it was quite a nice tune, so we finished it off. It sort of half came off but I think it could have been a lot better. It was a rush thing, one of those things that took place over 24 hours. I think it stands up better as a demo."

Once the shock of Bowie working with Queen passes, it stands up surprisingly well, and Bowie's words – "they were not a finished lyric," he insists, "it was done so quickly that some of it makes me cringe a bit, but the idea I like" – are consistent with both the sentiments of *Scary Monsters* and the positive Bowie to come; his new LP, *Let's Dance*. CONTINUES OVER»

GETTY IMAGES

Modern Love: Bowie, born again again for the MTV era

DESPITE THE PERSISTENT line about Bowie's inconsistency, he has always been remarkably constant in those matters he cares most about. His concern for the young dates right back to Ziggy Stardust, when he was first alerted to the awesome responsibility that goes with mass popularity. His "inconsistent" taking and shedding of masks, his cultural leaps, are all ways of keeping that responsibility fresh and his audience on their toes. I mean, can't a man change his mind without being hauled over hot coals for doing so?

If rock critics have generally been loath to acknowledge his integrity, preferring instead to see only the chameleon figure intent on protecting his privacy from public scrutiny, the Japanese director Nagisa Oshima chose Bowie to play a godlike Prisoner Of War, Jacques Celliers, in his upcoming film *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* precisely because he saw in him such a quality.

"People ask me why I cast actors from the world of rock," remarks Oshima in the film's publicity notes. "It is because they are sensitive to what people want now; they are performers; their antennas are screwed on tight and they don't mind getting right in there and having a go at the truth.

"When I saw David Bowie act in *Elephant Man* in New York I knew immediately that this was the perfect actor to play Celliers. He had an immense passion, something that superseded reason. If the character Celliers had only his Western rationalism to counter Hara and Yonoi (his two Japanese protagonists) he would have been destroyed very rapidly.

"But it is Celliers' spirituality, his personal nobility, his inner peace and indestructible charisma that the Japanese captors cannot come to terms with. David Bowie has all these qualities."

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

In 1993, in a bid to gauge his appeal to modern teenagers, Bowie's management company Isolar conducted market research with a focus group of 14 year-olds. For these teens, Michael Jackson and Madonna were 'classic rock' figures, while David was associated with "Let's Dance" and one other word: 'gay'.

AFTER THE BBC production of *Baal*, this ought to be the first acting role to really test Bowie. Unlike the alien of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, the 200-year old man of *The Hunger* and the hideously deformed Elephant Man, Celliers has no "emotional limp" for Bowie to hide behind. Maybe something of the character has rubbed off, for Bowie's new positivism, as testified by the clear blue narrative of *Let's Dance* and his recent spate of public appearances suggests that he has dispensed with the need for masks… "And it is necessary only for a man to ask for his seed to be chosen and to pray for the sower within to sow it through the deed and act of himself, and then the harvest will be golden and great." (From *The Seed And The Sower*, by Laurens Van Der Post, on which *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* is based.)

The David Bowie sitting opposite is charming and chatty, far more relaxed than his TV self, smiling and laughing frequently to relieve the tension. Suffering terribly from nerves, however, I miss his first tension-relieving joke: "You're part Swiss? Which part? Ha ha."

Now aged 36, he has never looked healthier. His sunbleached hair is a natural straw colour. His face tanned an ochre brown by his recent working sojourns in Australia and the South Seas. He is sprightly dressed in an olive green khaki blouse that emphasises his boyishness.

Within the confines of a 50-minute interview with a complete stranger he is extraordinarily forthcoming about his work, revising opinions of his past in light of his present attitudes. Quite naturally he only lets slip so much of himself as relevant to what he is doing. Dare we expect more from our public figures?

II: THE INTERVIEW

BOWIE: I'm talking more in generalisations because I think they probably serve a better purpose than honing down to one direct point. It's easier to make a stronger statement with a generalisation, to make such a strong impression with a popular song lyric.

NME: The strongest impression left by your press conference was your concern about the worthwhile nature of popular music.

For me, personally, my business is my business and it just strikes me... er, I don't really have the urge to continue as a songwriter and a performer in terms of experimentation – at this moment. I feel that at the moment I'm of an age – and age has an awful lot to do with it – I'm just starting to enjoy growing up. I'm enjoying being my age, 36, and what comes with it in terms of the body. It physically changes. Mentally and emotionally there are big changes, especially if you have been thrust in the front of popular and mass observation.

ALAN DAVIDSON/THE PICTURE LIBRARY LTD

If you've been observed, as I have for the last 12 years, well, you have to contend with that one way or another. You either care about it, or you don't anymore. You think, well, as I have this platform, there's something I can do with it.

And frankly I don't think I would want to continue performing anymore if I didn't think I could do something hopeful and helpful with my music, both for myself and my audience.

How do you define music that is hopeful and helpful? What evidence we have from you at the moment is a celebratory dance record as opposed to something that points anywhere.
Yes. I think it will have a lot to do with [*adopting a mock preachy tone*] people shouldn't fight each other. People shouldn't kill each other and people should try to live together.

Isn't that a little simplistic?
Yes, it is simple.

Your positivism seems to parallel that of Jacques Celliers, the character you play in *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, leading by action and deed.
Instead of intimating change try and do something about it.

You identified pretty closely with the character then?
Yeah, I think I immediately identified with him because of his own personal turmoils, his and mine stemming from different sources. With Celliers, he's ridden with guilt most of his life because of his relationship with his younger brother, which caused him to embrace that particular wartime situation, and gave him that kind of particular strength. That is pointed up a lot more in Oshima's screenplay than it probably is in the book.

And for me, personally, I guess it's the idea of through all my experimentations I have learnt a lot; and there must be something I can do with it on a very simplistic level now. I don't have the urge to play around with musical ideas. At the moment. Anymore.

The present loss of urge to experiment… is that an indictment of the *Low*/ *"Heroes"*/ *Lodger* period? Can't humanity and technology sit together?
It's just another way of using my songs. I think I'm just a little tired of experimentation now. But electronics are rewarding in terms of playing around with atmosphere and trying to reach different parts of the mind, funny corners of the mind…

But there is a proliferation of synthetic instruments being used in that kind of, er, Me Generation icy cold vein.

It's such a wide, sweeping statement, that at the moment, I feel it's very hard to use those instruments without a preconditioning already there. That if you use the synthesiser it means this particular thing; that I'm part of this angular society. So that's why I've used a very organic, basic instrumentation on this new album. Such instrumentation doesn't say anything other than it comes from a hybrid of white and black culture. That is the only underlying subtext it has really...

"I DON'T WANT TO BE THE GRANDFATHER OF NEW WAVE. THAT'S QUITE AN EASY ONE FOR ME TO SLIP INTO..."

As I say, experimentation can be rewarding for finding awkward stances musically. But it just isn't satisfying after a while. And it's not satisfying because it's not very useful, except – as Brian Eno would say – for setting up a new kind of vocabulary. Now I've got the vocabulary I'm supposed to do something with it! Ha ha.

On the other hand, the subliminal aspect of electronics allows one to speak more through the music than does rock'n'roll, where the vocabulary is so well known it has lost its efficacy.
That's the premise, surely, yeah. It does speak in those terms, but I think also to reach a large audience they're not willing to listen to the music, or play the records, if they're couched in terms they're not really familiar with.

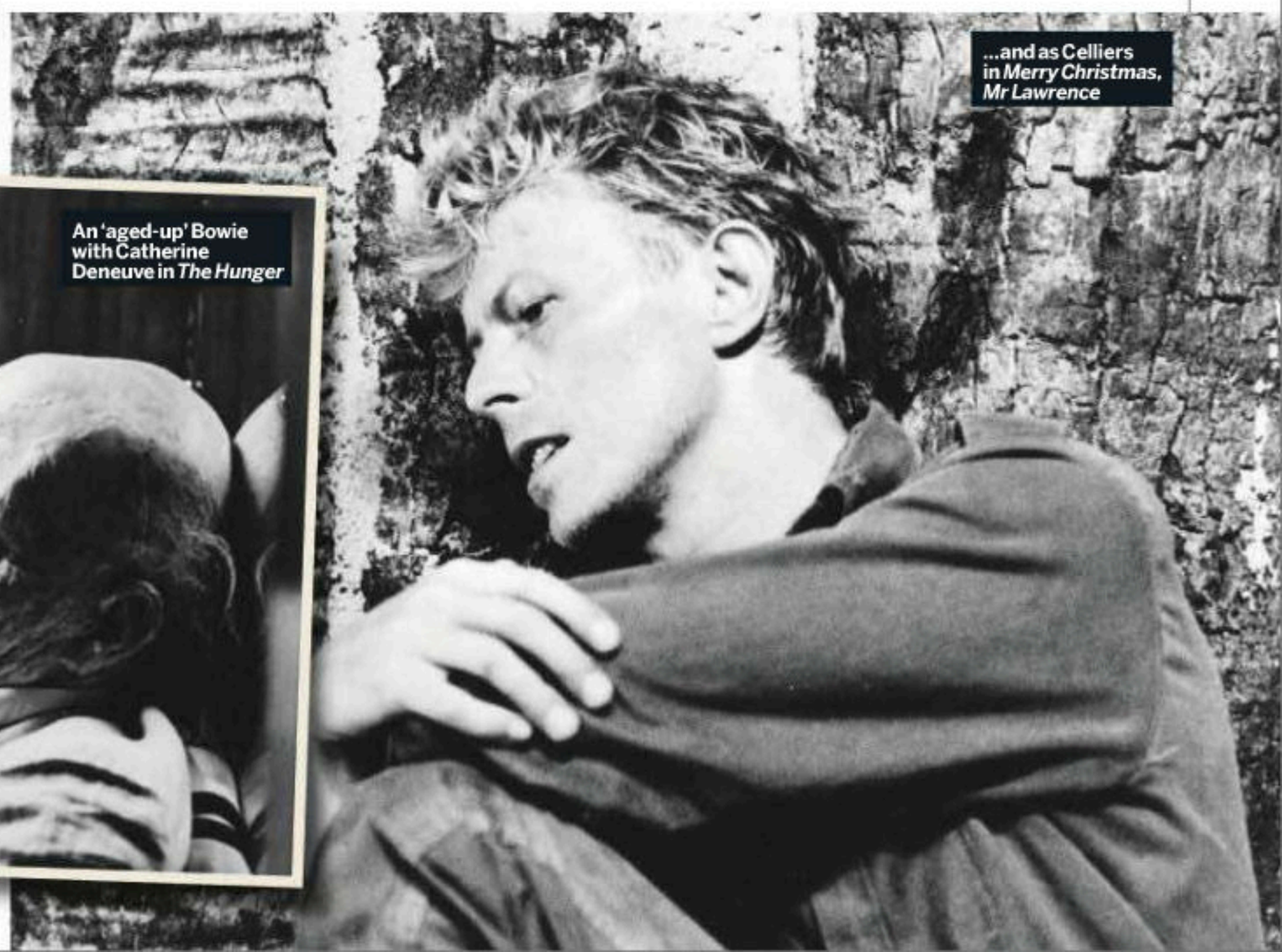
I mean, they're not going to sit and listen to that kind of music and accept it. It's like American television; the record-buying public of America is still very much in the television format mentally and it is impossible for them to listen to something that doesn't make its point in the first 30 or 40 seconds. And I'm starting to subscribe to that at the moment.

Previously you've said you're not worried about your experiments losing your old audience, that you were content to pick up new audiences as you go along.
Hmm.

Are you effecting a reconciliation with your old audience?
I don't think so. I think the music I'm writing at the moment is probably going to reach a newer audience for me. But if I am going to reach a new audience then I'm going to try and reach it with something to say, which is on a very obvious and simplistic level. I don't want to be the grandfather of new wave by any means.... that's quite an easy one for me to slip into.

I think I'll come on as the simple country boy, ha ha, and go completely against that.

Laurie Anderson said she wanted to balance the tendency towards horror imagery with imagery that's nice, humanistic and warm. But the problem is making such imagery equally as compelling as horror. Are you presently being confronted with a similar problem?
That particular balance has had CONTINUES OVER»


...and as Celliers in *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*

An 'aged-up' Bowie with Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger*

not a small part in a lot of the material I've written, but I think I understand what she's saying. I don't know enough of her work, but it's certainly the case in 'O Superman'. That's a very delicate balance, a marvellous piece of work. Did you see her in concert? I thought she was dynamic, really was impressed.

For me, I'm writing something that I've never really touched before, which is a one-to-one situation. I mean an emotional situation between two people…

Such a situation seems to take up at least five tracks on the album. The love situation, the emotional situation between two people seems to have escaped me – or I've avoided it is probably nearer the truth – since I started writing. Usually, it's been the man in isolation and all that.

Whether I'm becoming either one, comfortable or two, complacent with myself– I dunno which it is – but it is something I can feel I can now get involved with as a writer.

I suppose the obvious question to that is: is it a response to your personal situation?

Very much so. Are you married? So you don't have children? I would never have thought it possible but for me the one most enjoyable and hope-giving quality of my life over the past four or five years is my son.

When the son gets to the age of nine, ten, 11 and 12 and starts asking those really inquisitive, curious and unanswerable questions, well, my response has been to consider how important life is, and how important it is for him.

And as it became more important for him through me I found it became more important for me as well; and our future collectively started taking precedence over everything else. It's amazing what a son or a daughter does for a chap. Ha ha ha.

That's had a very positive and strong bearing on whatever I intend to do in the future. I feel I have to make a commitment to something more altruistic to that which I've been concerned with before.

If that sounds like a turnaround, then it's a turnaround, and it has to be and I would have to face that charge. But I don't think it will quell my natural inclination to want to experiment with music, though I think it will modify it greatly.

Insofar as you wouldn't want anything you do to upset your son?

It would make me reflect on anything that would produce the kind of nihilistic quality which was so much part of my early music.

Hopefully I was falling out of that anyway. That period had a lot to do with my problems as a human being. To produce that kind of music, though it's interesting to look at someone really fucked up writing music, it's not very helpful.

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

The video for "Let's Dance" was considered important enough to Australian art history that in 2006 it was included as part of the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Art Award. It appeared at Australia's Museum And Art Gallery Of The Northern Territory as a special video installation.

Filming the video for "Let's Dance", Australia, 1983

Because it provides too much of a role model?

Exactly, yes, and I would like to play down all that stuff a bit and make the subject matter, give that more relevance. It's such a complicated, confused time and my only reaction to that would be to make the subject matter very simple.

The very simple problem is that we're on a terrifying voyage and the effects that have been brought about by those causes are really quite transparent and obvious: the need to belong to small tribal units when there seems to be too many other people about; the mistrust of somebody who is not from one's own origins.

Those kinds of things are so obvious that I guess maybe it's quite a good idea to write about them in a very obvious way. And I want to utilise videos to the same extent.

It's easy enough to glamorise a pop song. I've done that often enough in the past! You know, give it a surreal quality and a kind of detached… That's fine if you've got time to watch promos at that level, but these videos reach too many people and, anyway, there's too many of those kinds of videos. Video has become a part of the packaging.

So it occurs to me that it would be a very good idea to utilise those four minutes of space and try to make them say something simple and as hard-hitting and as hard-selling as a commercial, but in terms of human quality and human life as opposed to, this is the kind of outfit, this is the way you wear it and this is the kind of cool you have to have to be able to carry it off.

As you said before, the whole idea of the role model.

So it's a matter of playing invisible man, moving behind the camera, projecting normality?

Yes! Aside from the fact this is a marvellous chance for me to practise being a director – one can't get away from that! – it's also a chance to incorporate people other than myself as the fronts for the promos. I've had enough of that side; and it's much more fun to use actors, or even non actors, if I'm going to deal with that kind of subject matter…

ALAMY

Why Australia for the "Let's Dance" promo?
Because it's such a new country, yet it's already got such a well-established, progressive and technological aspect to its society. And because the indigenous peoples of that country have well and truly been put on the outside faster than in any other nation in the world.

It's really so polarised to the extent that it can be related to South Africa quite easily. Not so much in New South Wales, but in Queensland it might as well be South Africa. Aborigines have to buy their drinks in backs of bars – they're forced to use what is called the dog hatch in the back of the bar. Then they mustn't drink them on the same side of the street, they must go over to the other side and drink them on the grass verge.

The whole thing is ruled like that. There's absolutely no way they take part in modern society. Their education programmes are almost non-existent. Since the beginning they've been put in a ghetto situation. It's very hard for them to fight back at the moment.

Also they're very wary – and quite rightly so – of being seen as the last of the prehistoric tribes. They've done that bit, dressed up in war paint, spear and whatever for cameramen and it's kind of backfired on them. It hasn't defined their culture as being incredibly interesting and important; in their eyes it has just made them specimens.

People want to see the aborigines only in that context. [*Adopting touristy tone of astonishment*] "Aah they're great the aborigines! They still eat wichety grubs!" That kind of thing.

And the boy and girl in "Let's Dance", Terry and Jolene, they've never seen a witchety grub in their lives. They have no need to see one and they don't want to be portrayed like that.

What I very much wanted to do was to portray them as modern people not being allowed to take part in modern society.

But I found out with the promo you have to do everything in four minutes. So, obviously, you quickly get into stereotypes.

Whatever, Terry and Jolene were great, absolutely marvellous. They've had no experience in film, but they knew exactly how to respond to the situation we talked about, so they weren't at all worried when I said, Jolene, I want you to scrub the streets of Sydney! Ha ha. She said, 'Fine, yes, yes, that's how I feel!'

Did you choose Australia because it might have been too inflammatory to film a similar situation in Britain?
No. If it was done in England it would have been too much about the English situation. The other aspect I liked about doing it in Australia was that I found it intriguing to look at. I liked the slightly surreal quality of Australia itself. I purposely left out kangaroos, wallabies and boomerangs and all that. There's nothing strictly aboriginal. The city doesn't shriek Sydney. They are just obviously some indigenous people in some modern country. So it becomes an international situation. People are not used to seeing Australia on a general basis. In a black and white situation they are more used to seeing the streets of London or New York. So already it's a situation they're aware of, and then they don't take quite so much notice of it. They go, Oh yeah, black and white situation, New York, fine, I know about that.

What's the next video?
…but shooting the same situation in a different place, it doesn't look the same as anything you've seen before for that situation: modern black people in a modern white society. It's not quite anywhere you recognise, so it points up the situation more, so it could apply to any country – South America, South Africa, England, America – without identifying those obvious targets. It's going back to that old thing about juxtaposition.

You're willing to tackle such a difficult subject visually, so people haven't got words they can immediately turn into slogans, thereby damaging the "message"?
Exactly, yeah. That's another thing. A slogan can kill a cause far quicker than anything else, because it's so easy to package it. Once you put a box around anything it's over.

> **"I'VE STARTED LISTENING TO A LOT OF MY OLD SONGS. I GUESS THEY KIND OF STAND UP IN THEIR OWN PLACE AND TIME"**

I'm trying to keep things simple without sloganising. It's easy to say 'Give Peace A Chance', but once said it's wrapped up in such an insular little ball, it only applies to certain people. To keep it free of that, I guess it's down to pure statement.

It's very hard to attempt such a thing and I'm having a lot of trouble. There's only a couple of things on the album that have the right feeling, but that is definitely a direction that intrigues me more and more.

Is it easier to deal with complexities on film than it is in song?
That is the problem I'm having, dealing with it in song format. Sometimes you can end up sounding neo Dylan or something and that is already stylish and part of a particular cliquey kind of songwriting. I'm not very good at it yet. I'm still working on the one-to-one relationship, and from within that situation trying to create an overall humanist feeling.

It is hard. I think Jim – Iggy Pop – is much better at it than me. If he could be manoeuvred into that kind of situation he could produce some stunning social observations.

I'd like to cover more of Jim's songs because I still have a penchant for exposing talents that I think are valid and important. Jim's songs are so good, his lyrics so fine, he really is a wonderful American poet. He's absolutely great!

So it's great to be able to take advantage of what I can do and include some of his songs.

"China Girl" [*by Pop and Bowie*] is another track on the album. Now that's a committed piece of writing, it's a very strong piece. Where, for instance, the subject matter of "Let's Dance" is nebulous. There is an undercurrent of commitment, but it's not quite so straightforward…

It's a one-to-one thing, yes, but the danger, the terrifying conclusion is only intimated in the piece. It is not apparent what exactly the fear is that they're running from. There's an ominous quality about it, quite definitely. That was the dance song that has all the trappings of old disco music, but it's almost like the last dance.

The last dance? Aren't we in danger of coming back to the apocalypse?
We are indeed. [*Laughs*] That's what we are in danger of doing, indeed, yes. Well, in terms of writing I've got a background to shake off which is very hard to get out of, because I find it very easy to… [*mimes striking keyboards*] weurgh! Ha ha, I find it very easy to hit the right chords and bring it all about… whoargh, that's great, that's really horrible! Ha ha. And it's difficult for me to sort of say let's turn the corner here and make it go somewhere else. It's a natural entrapment of my own that I have to be careful of in future.

How do you feel about your legacy of songs in light of your present positive attitudes? Can you still sing them?
Oh quite easily, yes. No problem at all. I've started listening to a lot of my old stuff, gone back to find out what I was writing then and why. I guess they kind of stand up in their own place in time. Not many of them carry through; I don't think of them, like, that's a great old chestnut, sounding good year after year, but they're all interesting.

It's a personal bias, but with every song I've written I identify so much with the time and place it was written in. It's hard for me to shake off the particular year or particular trauma I was going through at the time.

It's much easier for the audience to do that. There's the Duchamp thing about the point where the artist really has nothing more to do with this work. I can only see mine in terms of, Yeah, November 1975, and go phew [*mimes shuddering*]. Ha ha.

But for me to be able to carry on interpreting them, it's enough that I find them all very strong pieces of writing.

Do you ever get the urge to follow Duchamp into silence?
Frequently, yeah. It occurred to me over the past couple of years that if I was going to continue writing it has to be something I can do with conviction. I can't just play about at it, pretend that I'm enjoying it, sort of continuing a career, something like that. If I CONTINUES OVER»

The newly "grown-up" Bowie: "I know my 17-year-old-self would say 'Aw, what a waste...'"

was going to continue, then why? Well, I wanted to continue, because I wanted to do something positive with it and that's the only way I'll be able to continue today.

The recurring statement through your '70s interviews was about trying to shake off that middle-class ball and chain.
I'm lumbered with that problem. I mean I'll have it for the rest of my life. Ha ha.

Succumbing to it?
I think so, yeah. I think I've accepted that situation. There's no way I can make myself other than what I am [*Bowie pauses and bursts out laughing*] Now that's a funny thing for me to say, isn't it? [*Laughter*]. What a ludicrous thing to say, David! But it is somewhere in there, yes. One faces up to all these things. I'm armed with all these things, my problems with my own background, my own personal problems or whatever. I'm not so detached from myself anymore. I feel in touch [*Mimes peace sign, laughing*]. Hey, I feel in touch with myself! Think of every cliché in the book and that's probably how I feel. Then, a cliché probably develops life because it comes from a point of truth.

How do you think your 17-year-old self would feel if he were confronted with your present 36-year-old self?
My 17-year-old self would think, er, especially regarding the drift to where I'm presumably going, that self would probably think, ah, what a waste of how to be exciting or radical or whatever. I know my 17-year-old self would think, "Aw what a waste, ha ha ha. It's going to be really boring!" Ha ha.

And I'd say, "You wait till you're 36!" Ha ha. You won't think it's quite so exciting just working in dark areas. Ha ha.

Last year Lou Reed said he was quite prepared to write rock'n'roll songs for adults. On *Scary Monsters* you seemed to be addressing the young still.
Did it really feel like that? That's interesting. You could probably answer that better yourself, but I would imagine it seemed like that because the instrumentation, the actual effects of the instruments and quality of production... well, they were incorporating all the sounds that are radically part of the youth culture music. The epitome of the new wave sound at the time, from bubbling synthesisers to erratic and unconventional guitar playing, it had all those elements that are by definition the young way of playing music.

Songs like "Because You're Young" and "Teenage Wildlife" reminded me of the Hagakure [*Samurai ethics*] author Jocho's dangerous advice for the young:

GETTY IMAGES

Human life lasts but an instant. One should spend it doing what one pleases.
Well, that would apply to Oshima as well as Mishima [*who popularised the code with his modern commentaries in On Hagakure*]. The funny thing was that before Mishima died he and Oshima did an interview on television, separately, but as representatives of the radical right and left, respectively. Oshima was furious with the thing afterwards, because they agreed on just about everything! He said he was completely floored by that and it was one of the reasons why he started to modify his own political ideas, because he felt that kind of polarity just produced the same end result.

He was very concerned about that, because he didn't like being the same as Mishima at all! There again I qualify that by saying that the Japanese left and right are quite different from Western ideas of left and right, where it is estranged left and estranged right. In Japan both would probably have roots in the same source than they might have over here. They both say, "Let's stay Japanese." And when you've got that you're almost cancelling out everything else!

Then it just becomes a matter of how you do it…
Yeah, they do have that problem, the Japanese. [*Smiles*] Oshima, of course, was very much part of that unrest in the '60s…

Oshima is primarily concerned with exploring Japanese morality and the way it hides itself, the real position of it. The etiquette against the real life of the Japanese is very important to him, the closest repressed thing they have about them, where there's a turmoil of emotional conflict going on hidden by this veneer of the perfect style, the perfect life, which is such a front. Which I suppose, as an Englishman, is the perfect thing for me to write about. Ha ha. Actually his process of working is more interesting to me than the subject matter.

There might have been pressure on Oshima to moderate his views because he just couldn't work anymore. There were five years when he was almost completely ostracised from the film community after *In The Realm Of The Senses*. They really came down on him like a ton of bricks after that movie.

I dunno, this one's going to upset the apple cart again as far as Japan is concerned so it might be another five years before he makes another one! [*Laughs*] But he will say these things about his own people! Ha ha.

But you avoid saying the like about your own people?
That's interesting.

Jumping from culture to culture might be interpreted as another set of masks.
Yeah, you know [*thoughtfully*] I suppose it's I don't think I have enough experience of England to be able to write objectively about it, which seems a pretty poor thing for an English chap to say! But I really don't. Not that I know more about anywhere else, but at least I'm there. In the other places, because I've been just about everywhere else other than England. I mean, one gets left behind news or secondhand reports from what newspapers are worth trying to glean anything from, anyway. I pick up most of my news from the *Christian Science Monitor*. That's the only one I can find that really doesn't have a bias on it.

I think "China Girl" is the nearest thing, especially in the video I've made for it [*again in Australia*], well I think the interpretation of that puts a bit of that right.

It's a very heavy song. I think I've dealt with imperialism in that video to a certain extent [*pause*]… he says. Ha ha.

In a four-minute pop video?
Exactly! Right that's got imperialism done. Ha ha. It does start to get like that, but well OK, that's all right. I work in pop songs, and that's what it will have to be…

When you purged yourself of the Victoria incident (you'll recall the time Bowie arrived back in Britain at Victoria Station with a theatrical flourish of outriders, salutes and loaded statements), you were saying it was some people of Berlin's far left that swayed you. How did they approach you on the incident?
The most illuminating conversation about that was with a couple of guys who really took me to task about the things I said about fascism in 1976, and they made me very aware of how much thought one should put into what one does and says. Because what one does has a lot to do with what one says.

They weren't responsible for making me finish with that whole drug period or anything, but they set me up and caught me on a very bad day, you know, ha ha. [*In a heavy Teutonic tone*] "So you're still a Nazi, David? Oh dear! Crumbs!" They gave me a real ticking off and that put me straight, I think. It really sorted that out in my mind about not being quite so flippant or fragmented or stupid or stoned out of my gourd to let myself get involved with those kinds of just hideous reflections.

The way fascism entwines itself with aspects of nationality makes it very difficult to refer back to nationality without appearing nationalistic.
Yes, that's a very hard balancing trick. At the time that whole thing was very much in the air. I just felt it happening and I wasn't even in England. In 1976, the National Front still hadn't been publicly acclaimed to any great extent, as far as I can remember, because when I came to England I got all these pamphlets and things [*loud laugh*] from Mosleyites, asking me if I was joining up! Oh fuck, ha ha.

And it was that hideous thing where, as an artist, you felt that there's something in the air, I can't even put it another way, but you can just feel it, you can just sense a situation or an atmosphere and that can go into your writing.

My problem is that after I've written something, or when I've started writing something, I then try to intellectualise what I'm doing. And that's when the problems usually begin. Especially when you try and intellectualise when you've just done a gram of cocaine, ha ha, and the offcoming statement is usually something that one doesn't want to refer back to a few years later.

Are drugs completely out now?
Oh absolutely! Drugs are no part of my writing or recording or anything. It's impossible to consider your life worthwhile, or the life of those around you worthwhile, if you're just fractured like that. I mean, God knows what would have happened to my son if I was continually stoned over the past 10 years. I probably wouldn't have him. He certainly wouldn't have wanted me.

He seems quite a sober character, from what you were saying at the press conference about his love of maths…
Yeah, but he likes Madness, though. Loves them. I thought he was going to start liking Flock Of Seagulls, which worried me a lot. Ha ha. But he saw them on TV and decided they weren't for him. Ha ha.

Seconds to Go. Panic!! David Bowie is modifying his reappraisal of his legacy, rightly claiming his past work can be played as a photojournalist snaps of the mood and atmosphere of the time they were written, when his publicist arrives to bring the interview to a close….
…If you want to conjure up the atmosphere of any particular period, well for me I can do it quite easily by putting on one of those albums. If you put on *Station to Station* it couldn't be from any other period than when it was written.

So, *Diamond Dogs* is still a vision of 1984 from 1975, not from one year off?
Exactly, oh yeah. It doesn't carry through. I don't know how the songs feel onstage, not being an audience from my own work in that way. I don't know if people take them as reflections or if they can still treat them as contemporary pieces…

> ***"THE PROBLEMS BEGIN WHEN YOU TRY TO INTELLECTUALISE. ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'VE JUST DONE A GRAM OF COCAINE"***

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Bowie shows off his knowledge of samurai ethics here, and has long been fascinated by Japan. Ziggy Stardust was inspired by Kabuki and Noh theatre, and the costume was designed by Kansai Yamamoto. David has a tattoo on his left calf with a Japanese variation of the Serenity Prayer, written in Katakana.

RELEASE DATE 14 | ARPIL | 1983

LET'S DANCE

"I want a hit!" A new label, slick new collaborators, and an oddly conventional new image pay dividends. *By Neil Spencer*

NEVER SENTIMENTAL ABOUT business or employees, David Bowie entered a new decade with particular ruthlessness. His divorce from Angie was finalised in 1980, and he divorced England to become a Swiss citizen in 1981, while 1982 saw his erstwhile management company Mainman wound up in the high court, with his royalty obligations to Tony DeFries satisfyingly slashed.

Best of all, his contract with RCA reached expiry in 1982. "I didn't like them because they didn't like me," summed up the singer at a London press conference to unveil his new album, citing RCA's lack of support for his recent albums.

His new label, EMI, fronted a regal $17m to secure Bowie's signature, an investment that brought a quick yield when *Let's Dance* went on to sell six million copies, spawning three massive hit singles along the way. It remains the most commercially successful album of Bowie's career.

Its popularity was entirely intentional. When Bowie hired Chic's Nile Rodgers to produce the record, he gave the guitarist a simple instruction: "I want a hit". Not that Bowie had been absent from the charts – his collaboration with Queen, "Under Pressure", had topped the charts in 1981 and his bizarre duet with Bing Crosby, "Little Drummer Boy", had reached No 3 in Britain's 1982 Christmas charts. Yet over the course of the Berlin trilogy and *Scary Monsters…*, Bowie's career had taken on a fragmentary quality, its momentum disrupted by excursions into acting and film.

Furthermore, Bowie had watched the UK's new wave and new romantics steal his thunder; the likes of Gary Numan, Duran Duran and Culture Club were all Bowie's children. What was needed was an international blockbuster, something to seal the Bowie brand (and by 1983, the concept of the corporate 'brand' had thoroughly permeated the music business).

Bowie chose Nile Rodgers as the man to deliver the killer blow. As Chic's lynchpin, Rodgers had created a string of classy, era-defining hits – "Good Times", "Le Freak" – and supervised Diana Ross' comeback, "Upside Down". Bowie's long-serving producer Tony Visconti found himself sidelined, as did guitarist Carlos Alomar. Rodgers brought his own, distinctive guitar style, plus Bowie had another axeman in his sights; Stevie Ray Vaughan, a little known Texas blueser who had impressed with his performance at the Montreux Jazz Festival. Vaughan's blazing, Hendrix-like sound was the antithesis of Rodgers' clipped minimalism, but Bowie correctly calculated the duo could combine the infectiousness of disco – which had worked for him back on *Young Americans* – with rock power.

As much was duly delivered. *Let's Dance* emerged brash and colourful, dominated by a walloping drum sound, given extra muscle by a 1950s horn section and shot through with Vaughan's dazzling Stratocaster solos. Subtle, experimental or challenging it wasn't. Dave wanted a hit.

The title track, the lead single, pulled one off instantly with its super-catchy guitar riff and sing-song melody. There wasn't much to the lyric beyond its cute "*serious moonlight*" phrase, but there didn't need to be; this was aimed at feet, not head. "Let's Dance" promptly scaled charts worldwide, its ascent helped by a media blitz that proclaimed 'BOWIE IS BACK' and a glossy, mildly controversial video that achieved instant rotation on MTV.

Shot in Australia, the "Let's Dance" video handed Bowie a narrator role, strumming nonchalantly in an outback bar while a strained storyline highlighted the injustice inflicted on native Australians. At a stroke it repositioned Bowie from self-obsessed outsider to concerned humanist. A new image – tanned, blond, besuited – nailed home the message of a refreshed, mature Bowie.

The follow-up single, "China Girl", repeated the trick. Written with Iggy Pop back in Berlin

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"It is warm, strong, inspiring and useful… Utterly worth the wait, *Let's Dance* is irresistible. You should be ashamed to say you do not love it."
CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY, NME, APRIL 16, 1983

"This album is frequently persuasive, at times has every appearance of being threatening and would make a good soundtrack for some fairly expensive thrills."
ADAM SWEETING, MELODY MAKER, APRIL 16, 1983

TRACKMARKS | Let's Dance

1. **Modern Love** ★★★★
2. **China Girl** ★★★★
3. **Let's Dance** ★★★★★
4. **Without You** ★★★
5. **Ricochet** ★★
6. **Criminal World** ★★
7. **Cat People (Putting Out Fire)** ★★★
8. **Shake It** ★★

RELEASED: April 14, 1983
LABEL: EMI America
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie and Nile Rodgers
RECORDED AT: Power Station, New York
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (lead vocals, sax, guitar, keyboards); Carmine Rojas (bass guitar); Omar Hakim, Tony Thompson (drums); Nile Rodgers (guitar); Stevie Ray Vaughan (lead guitar); Rob Sabino (keyboards); Mac Gollehon (trumpet); Robert Aaron, Lenny Pickett, Stan Harrison (tenor sax, flute); Steve Elson (baritone saxophone, flute); Sammy Figueroa (percussion); Frank Simms, George Simms, David Spinner (bk vocals); David Bowie, Nile Rodgers (horn arrangements); Bernard Edwards (bass guitar on "Without You")
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 4

days, Bowie's slick, melodic version was a remote cousin to Iggy's murky original, the "*swastikas in my head*" now appearing as outrage rather than fascination. Its video, featuring Bowie's latest girfriend Geeling Ng, mixed a sexy storyline (including a surf-soaked snog that paid homage to *From Here To Eternity*) with vague social commentary. Most importantly it depicted Bowie as a smiling, grown-up '80s male, weird no longer.

The remainder of *Let's Dance* was a jumble. "Modern Love", its frenzied opener, is a more enigmatic song than its retro, 1950s styling suggests, with Bowie apparently caught in a loop of failed relationships and metaphysical confusion, though the line "*It's not really work/ It's just the power to charm*" may refer to Bowie's view of his professional role. "Without You", while sagging under the weight of drum-heavy production, remains an elegant love-call.

The other half of the record (Side Two in vinyl vocabulary) is scrappy. "Ricochet" harks back to the dystopian days of *Diamond Dogs*, portraying workers trapped in glum lives with teenage poetics – *"In their secret fearful places they see their lives unravelling before them"* – without even a tune to lean on. Only a shortage of material can explain "Criminal World", a cover of a minor hit by Brit post-Glam duo Metro, whose mildly kinky lyrics may have reminded Bowie of his younger self. It's little changed from the original, bar a Vaughan solo.

Things improve with "Cat People", a muscular reprise of the song Bowie and Giorgio Moroder had written for Paul Schrader's limp movie of the same title, again enlived by a blistering solo by Stevie Ray, whose name would be made by his playing on the record, even as his relationship with Bowie curdled into acrimony. "Shake It" is as formulaic as its title suggests, a disco jog that belongs on a lesser Chic album and the only time here a synthesiser is prominent; synths were for Bowie copyists like The Human League, not the originator.

Let's Dance made Bowie into a marketable global star in line with the high-gloss, corporate '80s, but at a cost: apart from the peroxide hair and some over-gaudy suits, he was now an unusually wholesome creature – so much less fascinating than the perverse alien of the previous decade.

RELEASE DATE 1 | SEPTEMBER | 1984

TONIGHT

Exotic holidays with Iggy, religious apocrypha, Tina Turner, reggae... Screamin' Lord Byron chills out. *By Rob Young*

WITH THE GRUELLING Serious Moonlight Tour only just behind him, it was understandable that the Canadian sessions for David Bowie's next album had something of a relaxed air. The sound of *Tonight* is that of a giganto-star easing back on his laurels, tieing up a few threads left dangling from the past decade.

Principal among these is his relationship with Iggy Pop: two *Lust For Life* covers are included here, plus three more songs co-written with Pop, who adds guest vocals to one. For the first time since the Thin White Duke, Bowie also briefly inhabits a new fictional persona: the Valentino clone Screamin' Lord Byron, who appears in the 22-minute video "Jazzin' For Blue Jean". Same old thing in brand new drag?

At its worst, *Tonight* offers little more than insipid celebrity pop, most obviously on the title track. "Tonight" crucially omits the monologue that opens Iggy's original, which makes clear that it's addressed to a lover in the throes of a heroin overdose. Slicing that off leaves little but a hollow-eyed piece of throwaway reggae, on which Tina Turner's plastic soul vocal is utterly inappropriate. The cover of The Beach Boys' "God Only Knows" is supper-club smooth, with a guttural delivery that borders on Bowie self-parody.

But that's the worst of it. Much of the rest is distinguished by musical arrangements that point towards a sultry, pop-fourth world atmosphere: midnight reggae, marimbas and tart strings, Latin percussion and a peppering of saxophones. Hugh Padgham's gleaming production conjures the crisp, muggy soundworld of "Sussudio". Co-producer Derek Bramble, late of British pop-soul outfit Heatwave and cohort of Linx frontman David Grant, smooths Bowie's path into reggae/ska rhythms and locks in tight with Omar Hakim, the onetime Weather Reporter who, along with Tony Thompson, was one of several black drummers achieving big crossover success in the mid-1980s.

"Loving The Alien", which opens the album, contained Bowie's most arresting lyrics since *Scary Monsters...*: a surprisingly prescient meditation on Middle East geopolitics. He implies that the fear of the other that drove the Crusades, as well as modern day terrorism and the exclusion of Palestine, are all driven at root by the love for the biggest alien of the lot. Bowie revealed he'd been reading books of alternative religious history, including theories that the real Jesus survived until the Masada massacre and wrote one of the Dead Sea gospels.

Several sonic tics make "Loving The Alien" a memorable single: its prominent marimba, its genuinely melancholic gauze of synthesised strings; its "*ah-ah-ah*" backing vocals, lifted from Philip Glass's 'Einstein On The Beach' via Laurie Anderson's "O Superman"; and the way Bowie inserts the "*whoah oh-oh*" from "Ashes To Ashes" midway through each verse, like a glimpse of the earlier song in a distant mirror.

Bramble's bass is rocksteady through the reggaefied "Don't Look Down", a bright echoscape of piano offbeats, ringing guitar swipes and muted horns. Iggy's original namechecks Rudy Valentino, which appears to have inspired Bowie's Screamin' Lord Byron look when promoting this album – heavily kohled and wrapped in a paisley turban.

The 'shanty towns' mentioned in "Don't Look Down" crop up again in "Tumble And Twirl", another Bowie/Pop joint seemingly inspired by a holiday the pair took to Bali and Java straight after the Serious Moonlight tour. This kaleidoscopic showstopper of "*dusky mulattos*", "*hot juice in Coke bottles*" and "*open drains*" cascades forward on Pearl & Dean stabs and stutters, churning funk guitars, jazzy acoustic flourishes, and tropicana marimbas, containing simultaneously the exhilaration of global travel and the ennui of the world tourist.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Since *Young Americans*, Bowie has made music for giants... but here he casts something genuinely uplifting... intensely playable." RICHARD COOK, NME, SEPTEMBER 29, 1984

"There's a whole lot of care been taken over *Tonight* but not, I think, a whole lot of effort. It's seamless but it never breaks sweat. It's product." STEVE SUTHERLAND, MELODY MAKER, SEPT 29, 1984

TRACKMARKS | Tonight

1. **Loving The Alien** ★★★★
2. **Don't Look Down** ★★★
3. **God Only Knows** ★
4. **Tonight** ★
5. **Neighborhood Threat** ★★★★
6. **Blue Jean** ★★★★
7. **Tumble And Twirl** ★★★
8. **I Keep Forgettin'** ★★★
9. **Dancing With The Big Boys** ★★★★

RELEASED: September 1, 1984
LABEL: EMI America
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Derek Bramble and Hugh Padgham
RECORDED AT: Le Studio, Morin Heights, Canada
PERSONNEL: Carlos Alomar (guitars); Derek Bramble (bass guitar, guitar, synth background); Carmine Rojas (bass guitar); Sammy Figueroa (percussion); Omar Hakim (drums); Guy St Onge (marimba); Robin Clark, George Sims, Curtis King (backing vocals); David Bowie, Tina Turner (vocals on "Tonight"); David Bowie, Iggy Pop (vocals on "Dancing With The Big Boys"); The Borneo Horns: Stanley Harrison (alto sax, tenor sax); Steve Elson (baritone sax); Lenny Pickett (tenor sax, clarinet); Arif Mardin (arrangement, synthesizers)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 11

The enigmatic female addressed in "Blue Jean" is of this (third) world, too: guerrilla on a motorbike, a camo-ed, 501-wearing muse spotted in the pages of the *National Geographic*. Heard at this distance, "Blue Jean"'s crunching refrain, lined with The Borneo Horns' brassy clouds, could be a distant cousin of "Suffragette City" or something off *Diamond Dogs* (Bowie also credited The Troggs and Eddie Cochran). As *Tonight*'s lead-off single, it came tricked out with a headline-grabbing 22-minute film shot by Julien Temple at London's Wag Club, with a plotline involving Bowie and a double, a love triangle between an 'ordinary bloke', his girlfriend and a rock star.

The two remaining collaborations with Iggy provide the record's most muscular moments. "Neighborhood Threat" and "Dancing With The Big Boys" are the two that really stretch Bowie's larynx on *Tonight*: steroid-pumped, sweaty bouts of gated drums and seared guitars that anticipate the hard rock of Tin Machine. As much as anything else, Iggy's presence here was a charitable act from a successful old major to a fellow soldier who'd fallen on hard times; certainly (beginning with "China Girl") the royalties gave Pop a firmer footing than he'd had since the self-destructive late 1970s.

And that, apart from a brassy cover of Leiber & Stoller's "I Keep Forgettin'" – which Bowie claimed he'd been wanting to record since *Pinups* – was that.

Tonight's cover (by Mick Haggerty) – a mock-Gilbert & George grid with a background of sticky impasto oils – hinted at Bowie's interest in contemporary art which would surface more explicitly in the affluent 1990s. And despite its sprinkling of fillers, *Tonight* boasts a wider range of colours than *Let's Dance*, with a more inventive sound palette of exotica to match its world-touristic lyrics. In the sole interview he granted to promote the release of *Tonight*, Bowie told Charles Shaar Murray that he was searching for a particular sound "that I haven't really got yet" [*see the full interview on the following pages*]. "I'll either crack it on the next album," he continued, "or just retire from it." But for the rest of the decade he went on searching… and he didn't retire.

"DID I PLAY ON THE ALBUM? NOT AT ALL. I LEFT EVERYBODY ELSE TO IT..."

Or what happens when a control freak "doesn't work very hard"... As *Tonight* arrives, CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY joins an uncommonly relaxed Dame for tea at the Savoy. "I'm 37 going on 38 and I find myself thinking, 'I'm still doing it!'" he says, amazed.

TAKEN FROM NME 29/09/1984

THE WEEK BEFORE Carnival: London is gasping like a beached fish. All along The Strand is sweat and dust and air hanging heavy with the promise of coming thunder, but the foyer of the Savoy is a world away from the oven of Trafalgar Square just a couple of minutes down the road.

Cool and dark and marbled, it has something of the hallucinatory ambience of a mirage: step inside and you almost expect it to disappear, leaving you back on the blazing pavement.

In the tea room, with its vaulted ceilings and *trompe l'oeil* murals, an almost perfect insulation exists. Outside, the miners' strike could boil over in open insurrection: Maggie Thatcher could declare martial law and no-one inside would even notice. No-one speaks above a polite murmur: the walls seem to swallow sound, filtering and smoothing anything which would upset the equilibrium.

The Savoy is the next best thing to being underwater.

At three in the afternoon, a blue Mercedes pulls up outside and David Bowie walks briskly and decisively through the foyer and into the tea room, his destination a table tucked inconspicuously away to one side of the staircase. Bowie moves everywhere like that, with the calm and determined air of a man who knows exactly what he is doing and where he is going at any given moment. Whether this is actually the case is another matter entirely.

He is wearing – starting at the ground and working upwards – blue shoes, black slacks, a studded belt, a white shirt with a spidery black Picasso print and a crucifix on a neck chain. He is suffering from a summer cold brought on by a sweat-soaked day's filming in the sweltering confines of the Wag Club in Wardour Street, where a guest appearance on a US MTV gala had been laid down the previous week.

The principal items on Bowie's agenda are the release of "Blue Jean", his first new single of '84, a highly unorthodox video based around the song and directed by the young British film-maker Julien Temple (who directed The Sex Pistols' *Great Rock'N'Roll Swindle* movie and has since become the cutting edge of radical style and content in the pop video racket), plus *Tonight*, a new album with a dizzying variety of mood and technique.

Bowie arms himself with a fresh pack of Marlboros, a pot of decaffeinated coffee and a sandwich and settles down to explain why – after the numerous exertions of 1983, a year in which he released his best-selling *Let's Dance*, starred in two feature films and toured the world – he made an album this year in the first place.

CONTINUES OVER»

ALAMY

Icons incognito: writing collaborators (and holiday buddies) Jim and David

"I SUPPOSE THE MOST obvious thing about the new album," he begins, "is that there's not the usual amount of writing on it from me. I wanted to keep my hand in, so to speak, and go back in the studio – but I didn't really feel as if I had enough new things of my own because of the tour, I can't write on tour, and there wasn't really enough preparation afterwards to write anything that I felt was really worth putting down, and I didn't want to put out things that 'would do', so there are two or three that I felt were good things to do and the other stuff…

"What I suppose I really wanted to do was to work with Iggy again, that's something I've not done for a long time. And Iggy wanted us to do something together. We're ultimately leading up, I hope, to me doing his next album. We've been talking about it for a year or so and we've got him off the road. He's not on the road now and he won't be going back on the road for a while."

The star-crossed Iggy Pop – James Osterberg in civilian life – was one of Bowie's early heroes. His group The Stooges were the last word in late-'60s Detroit dementia, and Pop's blistering, demonic stage act was a primary source of inspiration for Bowie's own characterisation of Ziggy Stardust. When his own career took off, Bowie sought out Iggy and signed him to his then management company MainMan, who in turn signed the band to CBS, for whom Bowie mixed Iggy's *Raw Power* album.

The association didn't work out, but the two remained in contact, reuniting for two enormously influential 1977 albums, *The Idiot* and *Lust For Life*, both of which combined Bowie's production and melody lines with Pop's scarifying lyrics and vocals.

Bowie's massive 1983 hit "China Girl" was drawn from *The Idiot*, and now *Tonight* revisits two more songs from this period; the title tune and the savage "Neighbourhood Threat", as well as including two new collaborations by the pair and another song from Iggy's past, "Don't Look Down", written in collaboration with guitarist James Williamson.

"I don't think touring was having a good effect on him, particularly on his writing. He wasn't getting any done. He's always had an incredibly loyal following, but that's not really enough. Living continually from one gig to the next just made him feel that he was falling out of time, because he had no time to write anything any more: it just seemed to be a question of getting from Akron to Philadelphia and doing the rounds: I think 'China Girl' helped him out a lot that way, and now he's writing prolifically. Hopefully, we should be able to mull through about 30 or 40 songs by the time we come to record.

"I think more than anything else I write the musical side of the new songs; we worked very much the way that we did on *Lust For Life* and *The Idiot*, and I often gave him a few anchor images that I wanted him to play off and he would take them away and start free-associating and I would then put that together in a way that I could sing. Rather than write straightforward songs, he would do collective imagery, and we'd arrange things from there."

So it's nothing as simplistic as Iggy becoming your lyricist?

"No, not at all. I think it worked out around 50/50 lyrics on most of the songs, but Jimmy's work stands out most obviously on 'Tumble And Twirl'" (a surging, Afro-tinged snapshot of Bali and Java). "I think that's obviously his line of humour. The lines about the T-shirts and the part about the sewage floating down the hill… We had a holiday after the tour, Jimmy and his girlfriend Suchi, Coco and I – we went to Bali and Java, and in Java particularly the very rich oil magnates of Java have these incredible colonial-style houses with sewage floating down the hills into the jungle.

"That stayed with me, and watching films out in the garden projected on the sheets. It felt so bizarre to sit there in the jungle watching movies at the end of the garden through monsoon weather with rain pouring down. Images of Brooke Shields… quite absurd."

"*I like the free world*" sings Bowie in "Tumble And Twirl", a line less ironic than might at first be thought.

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

In 1999, Bowie recorded music for the soundtrack of PC game *Omikron: Nomad Soul*. He also played the character of Boz, a revolutionary leader, and appeared as the frontman of fictional band 'The Dreamers'. Clad in a digital thong, he performed songs from *Hours…* at an in-game gig.

MIRRORPIX, LFI

"I guess those circumstances make one quite fond of the 'free world' because a country like Java or Singapore is quite most definitely not free.

"There's an extraordinary split between one class and another, far more exaggerated than any class system in the West. If I had the choice between Singapore or Java, I'd pick England! That's what I meant by that line, but when put in a musical structure these things take on a life of their own – as we know from past experience!"

TWO OF THE Iggy tunes – "Tonight", which is a duet with none other than Tina Turner, and "Don't Look Down" – receive reggae treatments, which is something of a surprise, because Bowie's only previous dabble with ital beats came on *Lodger*'s "Yassassin", and Bowie stated at the time that he hadn't penetrated reggae and intended to leave it alone. What changed his mind about Jah music?

"I think it was the drum machine!" He laughs loudly. "I was trying to rearrange 'Don't Look Down' and it wouldn't work. I tried it every-which-a-way. I tried it jazz-rock, I tried it as a march, and then I just hit on an old ska-sounding beat and it picked up life. Taking energy away from the musical side of things reinforced the lyrics and gave them their own energy. I think working with Derek Bramble really helped a lot, because he played proper reggae basslines…"

Derek Bramble is Bowie's newest collaborator, the former bassist with British pop soulsters Heatwave and more recently musical partner to ex-Linx frontman David Grant. Bowie was introduced to Bramble's work by his London PR Bernard Doherty, was intrigued and got in touch. Bramble made the album's reggae tunes possible, because most Americans can't play reggae to save their lives.

"I'm sure Dennis Davis won't mind me saying this," (Davis, now with Stevie Wonder, was Bowie's drummer from *Young Americans* through to *Scary Monsters*) "but when we did 'Ashes To Ashes', that beat was an old ska beat, but Dennis had an incredibly hard time with it, trying to play it and turn the beat backwards, and in fact we worked through the session and it wasn't turning out at all well, so I did it on a chair and a cardboard box and he took it home with him and learned it for the next day. He really found it a problem. I've found that with American drummers, more so than with the bass players. Where Derek can succeed is that he will leave a lot of spaces. He's not scared *not* to play a note. Omar, I must say, didn't have a problem."

Bowie's drummer for the new album is Omar Hakim, who featured on a couple of the *Let's Dance* tracks and who replaced Peter Erskine in Weather Report in the same shake-up wherein Victor Bailey replaced my man Jaco Pastorius.

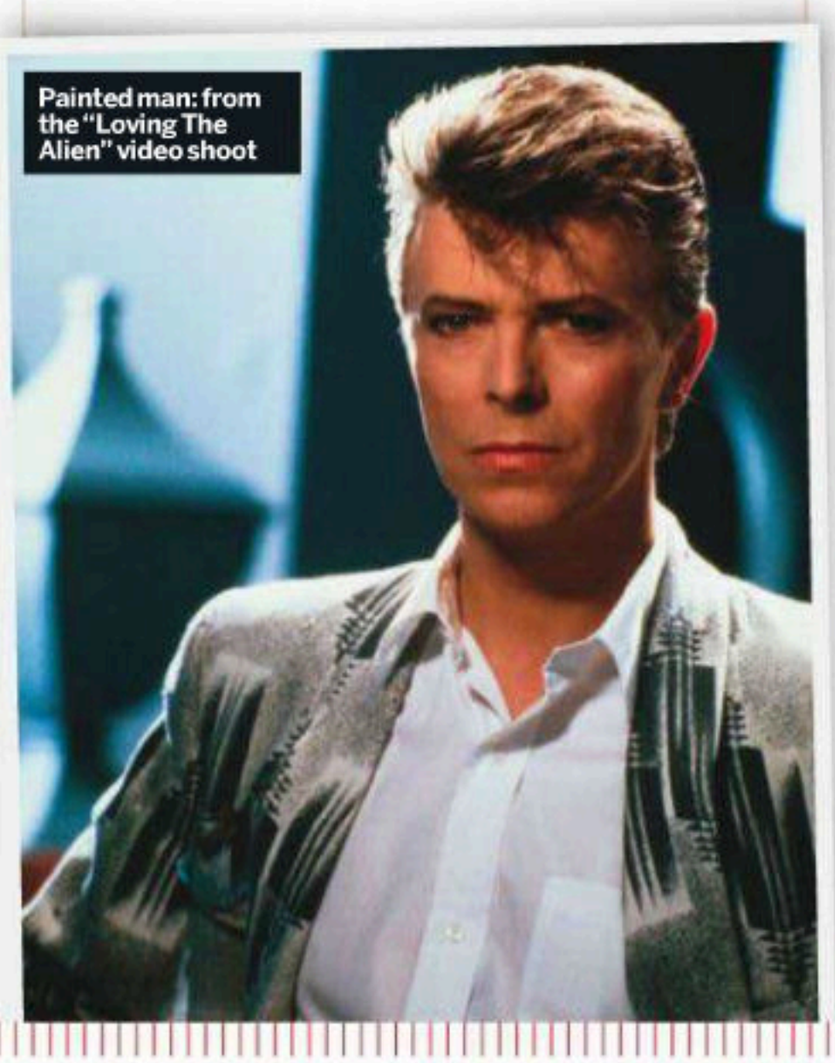
"What did you think of the album, by the way?"

I tell him that I approved heartily, except for the rather iffy version of The Beach Boys' "God Only Knows". He chuckles a trifle defensively.

"Really? Oh – I knew you were going to say that."

However, the reinterpretation of Chuck Jackson's "I Keep Forgetting" is masterful.

"Oh good! Oh, you liked that! I've always wanted to do that song… I think that this album gave me a chance, like *Pinups* did a few years ago, to de some covers that I always wanted to do. 'God Only Knows' I first did – or tried to do – with Ava Cherry and that crowd The Astronettes when I tried to develop them into a group. Nothing came of that! I still have the tapes, though. It sounded such a good idea at the time and I never had the chance to do it with anybody else, so I though I'd do it myself… it might be a bit saccharine, I suppose."



Painted man: from the "Loving The Alien" video shoot

"YOU DON'T LIKE MY VERSION OF 'GOD ONLY KNOWS'? OH, I KNEW YOU'D SAY THAT. IT MIGHT BE A BIT SACCHARINE, I SUPPOSE..."

Bowie's reinterpretation of "Tonight" itself, apart from transmuting the song into reggae, changes the context considerably by omitting Pop's hair-raising prologue, which establishes that the song is being sung to a lover in the throes of a heroin overdose.

"That was such an idiosyncratic thing of Jimmy's that it seemed not part of my vocabulary. There was that consideration, and I was also doing it with Tina – she's the other voice on it – and I didn't want to inflict it on her either. It's not necessarily something that she would particularly agree to sing or be part of. I guess we changed the whole sentiment around. It still has that same barren feeling though, but it's out of that specific area that I'm not at home in. I can't say that it's Iggy's world, but it's far more of Iggy's observation than mine."

DID YOU PLAY on the album yourself?

"No, I didn't. Not at all. I very much left everybody else to it. I must say, I just came in with the songs and the ideas and how they should be played and then watched them put it all together. It was great!" He chuckles to himself. "I didn't work very hard in those terms. I feel very guilty about it! I did five or six pieces of writing and I sing a lot, and Hugh Padgham (the engineer) and Derek put the sound together between them. It was nice not to be involved in that way."

It makes quite a change from the period between *Low* and *Scary Monsters*.

"Yes, I couldn't have been more dictatorial about it… I feel that period coming on again now we've had a refreshing bash with other people's songs and other people playing the way they want to play. I feel I really want to do something, probably with no more than myself and two other people, and build up tapes again. I haven't done that for such a long time.

"But I've got to a point that I really wanted to get to where it's really an organic sound, and it's mainly saxophones. I think there's only two lead guitar solos on it. No synthesisers to speak of, though, there are probably a couple of twing sounds or something. It's really got the band sound that I wanted, the horn sound."

FUNNILY ENOUGH, THE album's opener "Loving The Alien" features some *ah…ah…ah* backing vocals that are reminiscent of Anderson's 'O Superman'.

"No, that's Philip Glass actually, more reminiscent of 'Einstein On The Beach', but maybe Laurie was thinking also of that."

Both of the Bowie solo compositions from the album "Blue Jean" and "Loving The Alien" are astonishingly dissimilar to each other.

"Aren't they just! 'Blue Jean' reminds me of Eddie Cochran." He sings the opening lines of Cochran's "Somethin' Else" under his breath and follows it with the "*She's got evreh-thang*" line from 'Blue Jean'. "It was inspired from that Eddie Cochran feeling, but that of course is very Troggs as well, I dunno… it's quite eclectic, I suppose. What of mine isn't?

"Somebody once said – who was it? It's terribly important – that Harry Langdon, the silent comedian, cannot be taken on his own; you have to put him alongside that which went on around him, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and Chaplin. He can only be seen by reference and somebody said that about me, which is probably very true. I kind of quite like that, actually, that you can't take me on my own. You can only use me as a form of reference!"

He bursts into such hearty laughter that people actually start looking around.

"Don't ask me! The older I get, CONTINUES OVER»

"I HAVE COME TO THE REALISATION THAT I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHAT I'M DOING HALF THE TIME..."

Serious Moonlighter:
Bowie live in 1983

the less I know about what I'm doing!"

Regaining composure, he continues, "I think this'll be the last album where I'm involved in this kind of thing. There's a particular sound I'm after that I haven't really got yet and I probably won't drop this search until I get it. I'll either crack it on the next album or just retire from it. I think I got quite close to it on 'Dancing With The Big Boys'" – the Bowie/Pop collaboration that closes the album and occupies the b-side of "Blue Jean" – "which got somewhere near where I wanted it to be. I think I should be a bit more adventurous. That was quite an adventurous bit of writing in the sense that we didn't look for any standards. I got very musical over the last couple of years; I stayed away from experimentation. It's not helpful sometimes, although it's a good discipline.

"I really got into that: trying to write musically and develop things the way people used to write in the '50s, but in 'Big Boys' Iggy and I just broke away from all of that for the one track. That came nearer to the sound I was looking for than anything. I'd like to try maybe one more set of pieces like that. Whenever anyone asks me what the next album is going to be like, I invariably reply 'protest' because I have as little idea as anybody what comes next.

"I'm terribly intuitive – I always thought I was intellectual about what I do, but I've come to the realisation that I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing half the time, that the majority of the stuff that I do is totally intuitive, totally about where I am physically and mentally at any moment in time and I have a far harder time than anybody else explaining it and analysing it. That's the territory of the artist anyway: to be quite at sea with what he does, and working toward not being intuitive about it and being far more methodical and academic about it.

"That's what produced the last two albums. I'm not sure how comfortable I am with that any more. It was fun for these two albums, but I'm not sure that I want to do that again."

OVER THE LAST few years, Bowie has performed a remarkable about-face from the solipsistic concerns of his early work and has concerned himself with the precise nature of the world that he finds around him, and the kind of world into which he wants his son to grow up. This 'un-typical' concern has, however manifested itself more through the visual imagery of the "Let's Dance" and "China Girl" videos than through any blatant pronouncement, which is probably just as well, since the political activities and statements of pop stars are generally devalued by the general received notion of entertainers as privileged cranks and eccentrics.

Despite his off-the-cuff remarks about "protest", Bowie has shied away from the overt statement, but he still feels that his responsibility exists.

"What one ends up doing, I think, is charity work, which is very interesting. I think it's because you start doing things quietly and low-profile rather than doing something excessive in one's writing. It's because I'm terrified of all forms of musical writing in the popular music idiom just getting crunched within days of release in terms of any political significance or any social statement they might make. It just becomes a T-shirt too fast. I often adore and appreciate the sentiment, but I'm just so unsure of myself in that area. I'm never sure how much real, physical manifest good it can do, whereas I know that if I do this for such-and-such a charity then that's a physical accomplishment that can do something manifest."

Last year, at the end of the British leg of the Serious Moonlight tour, Bowie put his act where his mouth was. With one show at the Hammersmith Odeon, he raised £90,000 for the Brixton Neighbourhood Community Association.

"In songwriting, I feel all at sea with that; I'm not sure where my place is with all of that. My writing for so long has been to do with the surreal that I don't even know whether I could take myself seriously as a writer of didactic statements. I'm not sure that as a writer I'm succinct enough to give it a wholeness."

Last year you used to quote John Lennon: "Say what you mean, make it rhyme and put a backbeat behind it…"

"Yes, I know, and John was so excessively good at that but the things I end up doing are done on a far quieter basis. Also having a lot of money is very problematic for changing things…"

People often don't take millionaire socialists like Ray Davies and Pete Townshend seriously.

"I know, and so it's best not to be one, but I take them very seriously. I take Pete very seriously. He's absolutely committed to his way of life and the expression of what he believes. Pete's quite right: it makes a lot of sense for people in the so-called artistic professions to become involved in areas that they are knowledgeable about.

"I think that unless one has a penetrating understanding of the social issues of the time it's very dangerous to get involved in other areas where one might be misled by forces who would take you off the path. It's very important not to be led, and in political areas I think it's very dodgy for a lot of artists – including myself – who have only an understanding of the topsoil of the political and social system to declare themselves under any political banner.

"But I tell you one thing that's a very interesting for me, coming back to England only periodically as I do, to see what happened with the 2-Tone music of a few years ago, to see how that black-and-white/together thing has now become a given in popular music here. That is incredible, and it's happened quite fast. That has made a difference, and it has said something socially and promoted, particularly for a lot of younger people, the idea of being together with another sex and another race. To put that against 1972, it has become a different world over here. Now that is something to get excited about."

Bowie himself has led integrated bands for the last decade, but it hasn't always been easy.

"Back in '74 it was something of an effort. Going to play in the South was something of an effort for my band. It wasn't a pleasant experience going down to Atlanta in those times: we had to just hit and run, play and get out as fast as possible. Socially it was just a no-no; it wasn't pleasant for them and likewise to a lesser extent it wasn't pleasant for me to see them being insulted…"

As Bowie wrote in "It's No Game": "*To be insulted by these fascists is so degrading.*"

"Yes, it was very much like that. I don't think that much has changed. We only played a couple of Southern gigs last time, Houston and Dallas… but things have changed, yes they have. It's changed a lot, especially in those big cities in Texas. I wonder what it would be like playing Florida now…"

THE SONG FROM the new album that deals most strongly with the pleasures and pains of the struggle for unity is the album's opener "Loving The Alien". It also approaches subjects Bowie has never tackled before: religion and history.

"It really doesn't fit in there very much, does it? That was the most personalised bit of writing on the album for me not to say that the others were written from a distance, but they're a lot lighter in tone. That one was me in there dwelling on the idea of the awful shit that we've had to put with because of the Church. That's how it started out: for some reason I was very angry."

CONTINUES OVER»

...with model Geeling Ng on the "China Girl" video shoot, 1983

GETTY

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Bowie and Elvis Presley share the same birthday – January 8. In 1972, Bowie arrived late to an Elvis show at Madison Square Garden in New York. Elvis was playing "Proud Mary" as Bowie, dressed in full Ziggy garb, found his front-row seat: "I'm sure many of the audience presumed Mary had arrived."

You don't normally hear people wearing crucifixes making remarks like that.

"I know... this" – he fingers the crucifix around his neck – "is strictly symbolic of a terrible nagging superstition that if I didn't have it on I'd have bad luck. It isn't even religious to me – I've hardly even thought of it as a crucifix, anyway, probably because it's so little. The most obvious lie or cover-up I can think of is through education... at the time of writing the song I was reading a book called *The Jesus Scrolls*, and the conclusion of that book is that Jesus died at the age of 70 at Masada and wrote a scroll himself, which is currently in the hands of the Russians, who are holding it over the Catholic Church. Actually I read that a long long time ago, around '75 – it was a real LA book, but it really stayed with me. The crunching thing about the Church is that it has always had so much power.

"It was always more of a power tool than anything else, which was not very apparent to the majority of us. I never thought about it as... as a child it was just going to church and listening to the choir and hearing the prayers, and it was never really made apparent how much weight they carried. My own father was one of the few fathers I knew who had a lot of understanding of other religions. He – this is an abuse of the word – 'tolerated' Buddhists or Muslims or Hindus or Mohammedans, whatever, and he was a great humanitarian in those terms. I think some of that was passed on to me, and encouraged me to become interested in other religions. There was no enforced religion, though, he didn't particularly care for the English religion – Henry's religion. Oh God!

"'...Alien' came about because of the feeling that so much history is wrong – as is being rediscovered all the time – that we base so much on the wrong knowledge that we've gleaned. Now some historians are putting forward the notion the whole idea of Israel is wrong and that it was in fact in Saudi Arabia and not in Palestine. It's extraordinary considering all the mistranslations in the Bible that our lives are being navigated by this misinformation, and that so many people have died because of it, and all the power factions involved..." Bowie sighs.

"I don't know... just like everything else, it's just a song of images. I can't ever see any cohesive viewpoint in my songs.

"It's a fortunate thing in music that so much of the subconscious comes through with the melody and the placement of a particular word on a particular word on a particular note. For better or for worse, the information is inherent in the song, not in the writer or his intentions or even in the lyrics. It's probably my strongest point that I write evocatively in terms of musical and verbal expression. When I put the two together it can be a powerful format, and I'm just starting to rediscover that. I think that's what's giving me the bug to be a bit more adventurous in my writing again.

"Recently I've used an *accepted vocabulary*, as Eno would say. I think because I was starting to feel sure of myself in terms of my life, my state of health and my being... I have relapses, as we all do, but I feel on the whole fairly happy about my state of mind and my physical being and I guess I wanted to put my musical being in a similar staid and healthy area, but I'm not sure that that was a very wise thing to do. I don't know.

"I never bloody know."

THE ROOM IS filled with the languid strains of celebrated ditties from the past few decades of the collective unconscious. A neatly attired man has walked to the piano in the centre of the room and commenced tickling it. The piano does not seem to mind. The conversation moves neatly to the subject of movies, including a couple of things that are not happening, like the alleged score that Bowie was described as contributing to a forthcoming adaptation of our old friend Mr Orwell's *1984* featuring John Hurt as Winston Smith and the late Richard Burton as O'Brien.

"No, I'm not doing that. There was talk of me doing that at one time, but I don't have enough time. I've seen bits of it and I think it's a fabulous movie. Really, really good."

Then there was the small matter of a role as the villain in the next Bond movie, a role allegedly (ho ho) previously declined by Sting.

"Absolutely out of the question. Yes, I was offered that. After Sting? I rather think it was the other way about. I think for an actor it's probably an interesting thing to do, but I think that for somebody from rock it's more of a clown performance. And I didn't want to spend five months watch my double fall off mountains."

Predictably, Bowie has a keen interest in and strong views on the British film industry.

"I like to believe that it's going through one hell of a shake-up. I think we've got some great young filmmakers, I really do. I think the guy that I'm working with, Julien Temple, is really a very perceptive and ambitious young filmmaker and I think he's going to end up doing something quite remarkable. *The Great Rock'N'Roll Swindle* wasn't faultless by any means, but it was rejuvenating, and I think his plans for his own film *Absolute Beginners*" – adapted from Colin MacInnes' classic '50s novel, scored by Gil Evans and featuring Paul Weller, Keith Richards and Ray Davies in supporting roles – should do a lot for young British filmmaking. It feels essentially London: but London not in a passé way. The excitement of London, which has never been featured properly.

"I mean, there are so many stories of young America and young New York."

America has indeed monopolised the '50s to the point where it's hard to believe that there ever was a '50s anywhere else.

"For instance, he deals with the '50s black riots in Notting Hill, and that's an area which has never been treated on film. That's an extraordinary thing to have even dug up; so few people remember that it even happened. He's got a very good chance of carrying it off. I'd love to do a feature with him because we've enjoyed working together tremendously. I've never ever put so much into someone else's hands in terms of making videos."

Temple, on the other hand, says that he's never had so much input from the performer on a video before.

"I think that what for me feels like handing stuff over to somebody else as a responsibility for other people still seems very much like a collaboration, but that's only by past reference. I was completely protective with everything I did, so for me loosening up on some aspects and letting Julien decide what camera shots should be used is for me passing the responsibility over.

"It's a bit like the album: for me, that was like standing back; having the courage to admit that other people have their own ideas on what should be done and that I shouldn't be so graspingly self-opinionated about what's best, not granting other people the respect that they deserve as musicians or whatever job that they have. It's taken me an awful long time to get to that point. I feel much easier working on a collaborative basis now.

"In filmmaking, I'd love to do a collaborative thing with someone like Julien. I don't think pop videos are very interesting, and I don't think video's going to go anywhere. Firstly, nobody's doing it on video. Forget videotape. It's all being done on celluloid. Video's out the window. Nothing ever happened to video; it's like the quadraphonic sound system, which just stood up and went down again. There are so many innovative people in video, but they'll never be accepted by the majority and never accepted on network television. The experimental videos will be as well received as experimental movies were, like *Eraserhead*. It'll have about that much impact.

"As far as video is concerned, the video format – stuff that gets called video and goes on television – I know the music channels in the States want to open up. They don't know which way it's gonna go themselves. I think we're coming to a revitalisation of the '50s short; that's the only direction it's going in. I know what I'd like to do with it; which is to start making full-scale movies for TV. What standard or quality they are is dependent on the people who put them together.

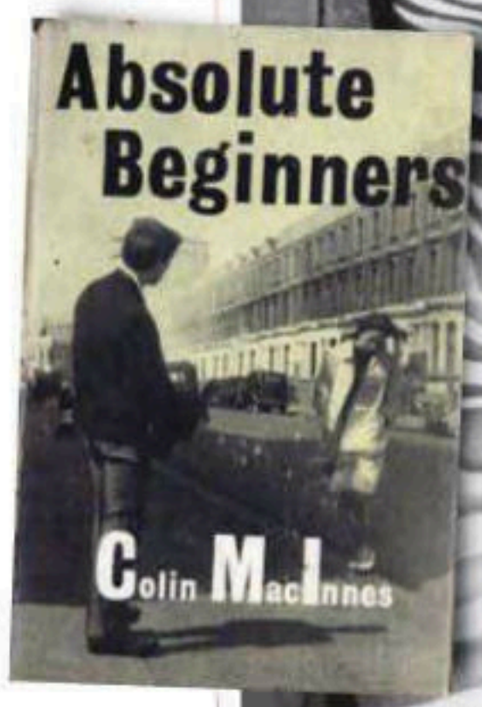
"The thing that we've just put together is more like a '50s short than a video, the music takes a back seat – more or less. It's a piece in

"THE CRUNCHING THING ABOUT THE CHURCH IS THAT IT HAS ALWAYS HAD SO MUCH POWER. IT'S MORE OF A POWER TOOL THAN ANYTHING ELSE"

the film. The first thing that EMI are going to have to do is put subtitles on it, because there's so much dialogue that it won't mean a thing if it's shown in Germany or Spain or France without them. The talkies – I think we're into talkies. The format of 'Blue Jean' is of a small talkie, and that's the emphasis.

"I think what is going to work is getting our finance out of record companies and video stations to make movies rather then the film industry. The producers in the video market are keener to make movies than the movie people: it's as simple as that, and some of us are taking full advantage and trying to make movies through this other channel, this new system that's developing."

Bowie's own current taste in movies – current movies, at any rate – includes John Schlesinger's forthcoming feature *The Falcon And The Snowman*.



"It's the story of two young American guys who sell secrets to the Russians. It's Tim Hutton and Sean Penn giving the performance of their lives, but I don't know how it will be received in the States given the current political climate. It's very objective, though one feels great sympathy for the two boys. It's a magnificent piece of film-making, the best Schlesinger movie I've seen in years."

Another current favourite is Wim Wenders' current release, *Paris, Texas*.

SO WHAT DOES Bowie, the arch-trendsetter think of current London fashion? He finds it considerably less impressive than, say, a Wenders movie or a good book.

"I think it's silly," he declares defiantly, and then snorts with laughter. "But it looks like fun. I can see that they derive an awful lot of pleasure from it, but I can't take it seriously. I don't think it expresses very much."

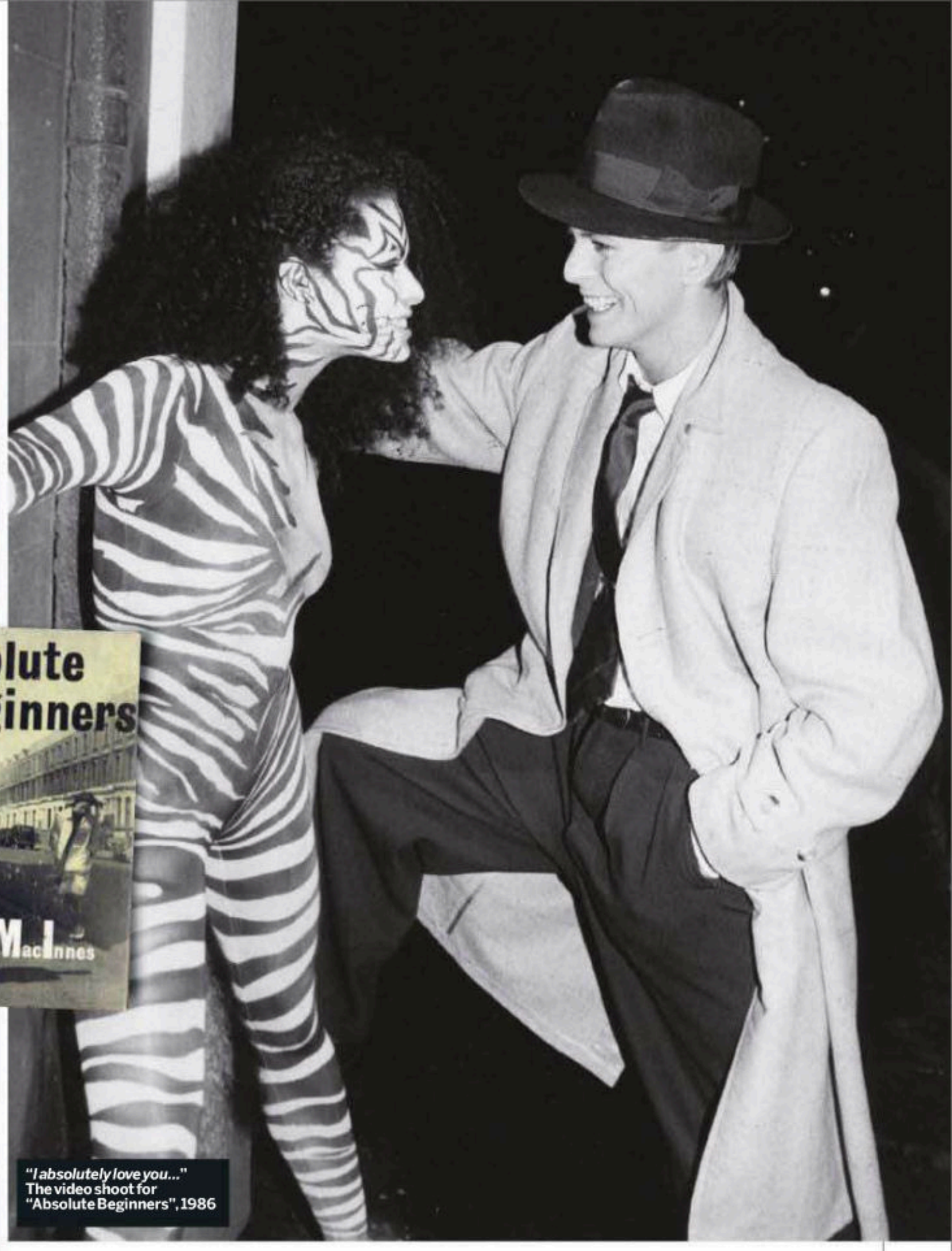
What, big white T-shirts with things written on them?

"God, I hate those damn things, I really hate them, that's why I had my Ernie character in 'Blue Jean' wearing a RELAX T-shirt!"

Bowie can afford to grin at the vagaries of frivolous youth. As he approaches his 38th birthday, he is securely enthroned as one of the pop racket's most dominant individual presences. He is a consistent innovator and experimentalist who nevertheless maintains a massive hold on the pop mainstream, and his career as an actor is just beginning. He has a huge, devoted audience which nevertheless not only refuses to demand that he stay with a winning formula but which virtually insists he follows his own instincts and desires. He is the '80s incarnation of the dashing English gentleman about the arts, reassuring and unsettling his public simultaneously. He's as established as an artist can get in this racket.

And yet…

Does Bowie think pop is at its best when it's dangerous, when it's something subversive and weird and unlike the harmless consumer durable we know and love today?



"I absolutely love you…" The video shoot for "Absolute Beginners", 1986

"It's very interesting to hear Julien talking about 'the old days' when he thinks back to The Sex Pistols. You mention '77 and he says, 'Oh, in those days, it was so dangerous then!' Well, it's not so far off, is it? If things are as cyclic as they're supposed to be, then it's bound to come. I didn't get the full brunt of all that, because it was just the perfect period when I was settling in Berlin, so it came from a different direction there and it didn't have the full wrath and anger of what happened in England. For me it's all just footage and I can't feel the same thing.

"I really regret missing out on that, I wonder how I would have received all that. I'd love to have seen the dialogue on television and all that, and the feel of the clubs at that time… of course that's a much healthier climate. Of course it is."

Could you see yourself contributing to another major upset?

"In rock, I think it's very hard for… after the initial point of view that you put forward, unless you're capable of adopting more than that initial statement, it's hard to come up with another that has the same kind of force that the first one did. For me, the early '70s period was the thing that gave me my opening. I don't think I would ever contribute so aggressively again…

"The interesting thing about rock is that you never think that's it's going to go on for much longer. Then when you find that it has… I'm 37 going on 38 and I find myself thinking, 'I'm still doing it!'

"So you're redefining it all the time. The whole animal of rock keeps changing itself so fast and so furiously that you just can't plan ahead. I've got absolutely no idea. I've got two or three anchors: to do some more work with Iggy and to try and write something for myself that is extraordinary and adventurous.

"Those are the only things in music that I know I'll be doing in the future…"

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

You'll know David's odd pupils were the result of a playground fight with George Underwood in 1962. But his vision came under a second attack in 2004, at a gig in Norway. A lollipop thrown by a fan hit him in the eye, leading his website to warn, "Please think carefully before you lob anything stageward in future".

RELEASE DATE 27 | APRIL | 1987

NEVER LET ME DOWN

"My nadir!" But beyond the '80s technoflash, is *Never Let Me Down* as bad as even Bowie believes? *By Garry Mulholland*

NEVER LET ME DOWN is the unforgiven Bowie solo album, forever seen as the irrefutable evidence of decline brought on by getting straight and embracing life as a blond, tanned and MTV-friendly celebrity rock idol. Even the man himself, in a 1995 interview, described the set as "an awful album" and "my nadir".

In fact, Bowie had been as creatively restless and eclectic as ever since 1984's *Tonight*. 1985 had seen him follow the elegant muso ambience of "This Is Not America", his collaboration with The Pat Metheny Group for John Schlesinger's *The Falcon And The Snowman*, with the self-congratulatory Mick Jagger duet, "Dancing In The Streets", which had topped the charts in the UK for the benefit of Live Aid.

The following year was taken up by film work, with roles in Julien Temple's adaptation of Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* novel and Jim Henson's children's fantasy *Labyrinth*. But his music for both – despite his gorgeous ballad for *Absolute Beginners* reaching No 2 in The UK – was drowned out by the chorus of derision concerning his acting skills.

Bowie's overwrought theme for *When The Wind Blows*, an animated study of an elderly couple struggling with the aftermath of nuclear war, hardly helped.

By the time *Never Let Me Down* was released in April 1987, Bowie's critical stock had substantially dwindled. The subsequent Glass Spider Tour sold three million tickets in Europe, The US and Australasia, but the critics moaned about bloated excess, synthetic takes on old classics, and the screeching guitars of Peter Frampton.

Bowie had told *NME* in 1984 that the follow-up to *Tonight* would be 'protest', and *Never Let Me Down* kicks off with its most blatant stab at agitprop. Single and opener "Day-In Day-Out"'s tale of a street girl trapped in a cycle of urban poverty and abuse was accompanied by an expensive and moderately controversial video, and is well-meaning enough. But much like, say, The Rolling Stones' "Undercover Of The Night", it feels like a rich, remote rock star's overstated attempt to connect. The music, like much of *Never Let Me Down*, tries to apply a techno-rock sheen to the *Let's Dance* formula; a crashing mix of hollering backing vocals, heavily processed guitar parts and thunderous drums drenched in slapback echo effects. As a teaser for the album it's no "Let's Dance" of course – it's not even a "Blue Jean" – and "Day-In Day-Out" limped just inside the UK Top 20.

But if "Day-In Day-Out" defines much of what's wrong with *Never Let Me Down*, it is quickly followed by the album's best shot. Inspired by the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, "Time Will Crawl" bounces along on a riff reminiscent of *Low*'s "Be My Wife" and deals with eco-fear and nuclear paranoia in classic Bowie fashion, with a catchy call-and-response melody and a sci-fi-informed sense of ironic dread. The album's other great moment is the title track, which sounds like a mix of John Lennon and *Provision*-era Scritti Politti. "Never Let Me Down" is the only track where the album's painstakingly plastic production truly suits the material.

The overwhelming majority of *Never Let Me Down* consists of potentially decent material strangled at birth by the monster that is mid-'80s record production, a hostile and forbidding planet where legions of expensive, vastly talented session musicians are hired to make their 'proper' instruments resemble shop-bought, pre-programmed drum machines and synthesisers, and where even the slightest song idea is forced to sound like it was recorded in a stadium through amps the size of Chieftain tanks.

There are glimpses of life visible through the

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Tries to hit all the correct mass response buttons... not so much a collection of songs as feeble gestures and half-baked themes."
GAVIN MARTIN, NME, APRIL 18, 1987

"Wilfully lacking grandeur, all too immaculate, processed ageing rock for Americans called Phil and Steve and Don in record company offices."
CHRIS ROBERTS, MELODY MAKER, APRIL 18, 1987

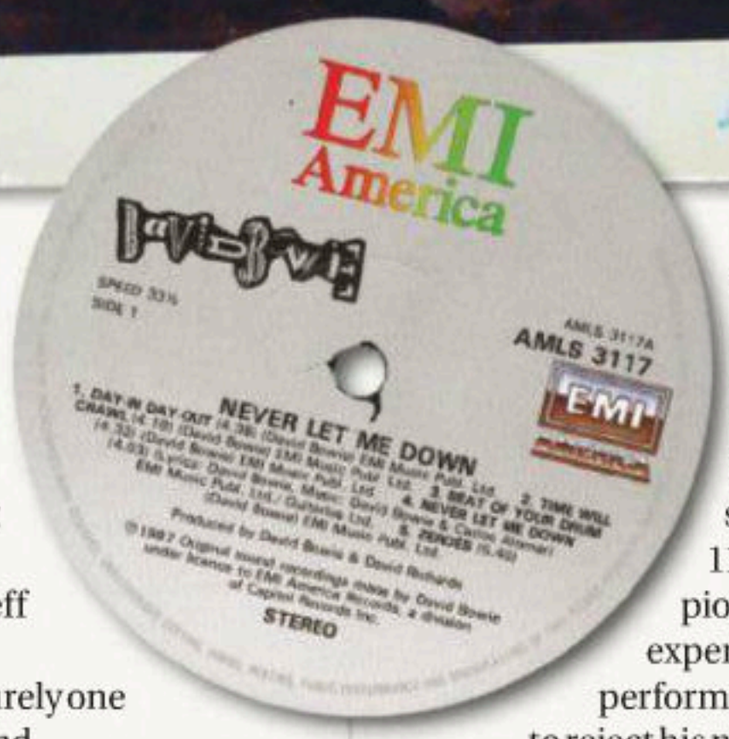
TRACKMARKS | Never Let Me Down

1. **Day-In Day-Out** ★★
2. **Time Will Crawl** ★★★★
3. **Beat Of Your Drum** ★★★
4. **Never Let Me Down** ★★★★
5. **Zeroes** ★★★
6. **Glass Spider** ★★★
7. **Shining Star (Makin' My Love)** ★★
8. **New York's In Love** ★★
9. **'87 And Cry** ★★
10. **Too Dizzy** ★★★
11. **Bang Bang** ★★★

RELEASED: April 27, 1987
LABEL: EMI America
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie and David Richards
RECORDED AT: Mountain Studios, Montreux, Switzerland
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, keys, percussion); Carlos Alomar (guitar, guitar synth, percussion, bk vocals); Erdal Kizilcay (keyboards, drums, bass, trumpet, violins, bk vocals); Peter Frampton (lead guitar); Philippe Saisse (piano, keyboards); Carmine Rojas (bass); Earl Gardner (flugelhorn); Crusher Bennett (percussion); Stan Harrison (alto sax); Laurie Frink (trumpet); Steve Elson (baritone sax); Lenny Pickett (tenor sax); Robin Clark, Loni Groves, Diva Gray, Gordon Grodie (bk vocals); Sid McGinnis (lead guitar on "Bang Bang", "Time Will Crawl", "Day-In Day-Out"); Mickey Rourke (rap on "Shining Star").
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 6; US 34

day-glo rubble of "Zeroes", with its affectionate revival of a Spiders From Mars-type imaginary band; "Beat Of Your Drum"'s weird mix of the themes of Bowie's "Fashion" and the tune of Springsteen's "Glory Days"; and the MTV-lite crash through Iggy Pop's "Bang Bang". The possessive teen shenanigans of "Too Dizzy", however, was retrospectively hated so much by Bowie that he pulled it from the 1999 CD reissue version.

The running order wasn't too wisely chosen, either. The vinyl Side Two prefaced the album's three most flimsy tracks – "Shining Star (Makin' My Love)", "New York's In Love" and "'87 And Cry" – with the song that named a tour. "Glass Spider" is an out-of-place attempt to revive the creepy spoken-word theatricality of "Future Legend" from *Diamond Dogs*, as Bowie intones the tale of an ancient spider made of glass that weaves its web out of the remains of the dead and leaves its babies to fend for themselves, over portentous synths and a poperatic 'chorus'. Occasionally reminiscent of a spoof of Richard Burton's narration from Jeff Wayne's *The War Of The Worlds*, it now stands as surely one of the most perplexing – and perversely enjoyable – non-sequiturs of Bowie's career.



Is *Never Let Me Down* really David Bowie's nadir? Behind the dated, alienating production style and the sense of thematic disunity, something fascinating lurks. Something about a man – who had just hit 40, remember, attempting to connect the comforts of health, wealth and an increasingly settled life with his natural restlessness, a man cast adrift in a decade where success was only measured in bums on seats and units shifted. As a result, these 11 tracks show a pioneering musician and experimental songwriter and performer trying a little too hard to reject his natural inclination toward wild ambition and tortured introspection, and replace this with social concern and upbeat love songs… and a desire to feel useful – and valued.

It would take David Bowie a good few years and the deliberate submergence of his own ego within Tin Machine to come to terms with his legacy. And accept that his self-indulgence was what was always most useful about him.

RELEASE DATE 22 | MAY | 1989 / 2 | SEPTEMBER | 1991

TIN MACHINE I & II

Bowie purges himself of '80s excess by becoming an ego-free part of a hard-rocking Machine. Results: mixed. *By Louis Pattison*

IT'S 1991, AND Tin Machine have just performed "You Belong In Rock'n'Roll" on primetime BBC1. After, the band – David Bowie, in lurid green suit, flanked by guitarist Reeves Gabrels, bassist Tony Sales and his drummer brother, Hunt – assemble for a chat with their host, Terry Wogan. It is a difficult exchange. Following some awkward banter about Gabrels' headless guitar, Wogan is evidently set on getting something – *anything* – out of Tin Machine's most famous member. But Bowie is in mischievous mood, and every question directed his way is dismissed with an impish witticism, or hangs in the air for his bandmates to dispatch. As Wogan becomes increasingly desperate, Bowie throws his hapless interlocutor the smallest of bones. "We just got around to jamming, really," he shrugs. "It felt like a good thing to do."

You can see a hairline crack appear in Wogan's strained mask of geniality. "And what *are* you trying to do?" he asks, baffled.

The gale of laughter following suggests that, if Britain's foremost chat show host found David Bowie's latest project a bemusing proposition, at least he had the public onside. That one of rock's most flamboyant, iconic, *egotistical* personalities was now just frontman of a band felt like – well, a betrayal of his position, somehow. That this band played rather cold, technical hard-rock, short on androgyny, soul, or much Bowie fans might recognise as "fun" made the disappointment cut deeper. Today, the group's oeuvre – two studio albums and a live record, 1992's *Oy Vey, Baby* – are little-known to all but the most rabid Bowiephiles, and the name has become byword for Bowie's creative follies; an indulgence best left with headless guitars, back in the 1980s.

Unfair? Perhaps not, but certainly, the impulse behind Tin Machine was sound. *Never Let Me Down* would later be dismissed by its maker, while the lavish Glass Spider tour was spinning off into theatrical excess. Tin Machine was conceived to be immediate, instinctive and egalitarian, Bowie's formerly autocratic approach to creativity subsumed within a group dynamic.

"I'm a very social person," he told *Melody Maker*. "I was isolating myself from the bands I was working with more and more. Now I can ask Reeves what time soundcheck is. It's so great now when somebody from the band comes and asks me something and I can say, 'I dunno, ask Hunt'."

Bowie as one of the boys; a peculiar idea. But if a hallmark of his career was about trying to stretch the definition of what 'being David Bowie' could possibly entail, Tin Machine might be seen as his attempt, as far as realistically possible, to remove David Bowie from the equation.

Tin Machine grew out of Bowie's friendship with Reeves Gabrels, a guitarist from Staten Island. Introduced by Gabrels' wife, publicist Sara Terry, the pair bonded over a shared taste: for classic blues-rock, Jimi Hendrix and Cream, but progressively, new guitar manglers like Dinosaur Jr and the Pixies, whose *Doolittle* predated *Tin Machine* by a month. As well as being technically skilled, Gabrels was, like Robert Fripp, wise to the sculptural possibilities of noise and feedback.

The band was completed when Bowie ran into bassist Tony Sales in a Los Angeles nightclub towards the close of the Glass Spider tour. The two were already well-acquainted – Tony and his brother, Hunt, had played rhythm section on Iggy Pop's Bowie-produced *Lust For*

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"*Tin Machine* is a triumph in that it illustrates there's still imagination and desire burning inside a man who we've no longer any right to expect it from."
STEVE SUTHERLAND, MELODY MAKER, MAY 27, 1989

"*Tin Machine II* can hardly be hailed as a classic, but at least Bowie's trying this time around. Echoes of his formidable past can be heard all over this album, as if Bowie has gone shopping for tried and trusted bands of old. David is a lad in Sainsbury's picking up 'tinned' memories to add to his new recipe."
TERRY STAUNTON, NME, SEPTEMBER 7, 1991

TRACKMARKS | Tin Machine I & II

TIN MACHINE
1. Heaven's In Here ★★
2. Tin Machine ★
3. Prisoner Of Love ★★★★
4. Crack City ★★★
5. I Can't Read ★★★
6. Under The God ★★★
7. Amazing ★★★
8. Working Class Hero ★★★
9. Bus Stop ★★
10. Pretty Thing ★★
11. Video Crime ★★
12. Run ★★★
13. Sacrifice Yourself ★★
14. Baby Can Dance ★★★

RELEASED: May 22, 1989
LABEL: EMI
PRODUCED BY: Tin Machine, Tim Palmer
RECORDED AT: Montreux, Compass Point Studios, Nassau
PERSONNEL David Bowie (vocals, guitar); Reeves Gabrels (lead guitar); Hunt Sales (drums, vocals); Tony Sales (Bass, vocals); Kevin Armstrong (guitar, organ)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 3; US 28

TIN MACHINE II
1. Baby Universal ★★★
2. One Shot ★★
3. You Belong In Rock'n'Roll ★★★★
4. If There Is Something ★★
5. Amlapura ★★★
6. Betty Wrong ★★
7. You Can't Talk ★★
8. Stateside ★
9. Shopping For Girls ★★
10. A Big Hurt ★★
11. Sorry ★
12. Goodbye Mr Ed ★★★

RELEASED: September 2, 1991
LABEL: Victory Music
PRODUCED BY: Tin Machine, Tim Palmer, Hugh Padgham
RECORDED AT: Los Angeles, USA and Sydney, Australia
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, piano, saxophone); Reeves Gabrels (lead guitar, bk vocals, vibrators, organ); Hunt Sales (drums, percussion, vocals); Tony Sales (bass, bk vocals); Kevin Armstrong (guitar, piano); Tim Palmer (percussion, additional piano)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 23; US 126

Life–and soon, the four were together at Chris Blackwell's Compass Point studios in Nassau.

Recorded quickly, with minimal rehearsal to retain a raw, instinctual feel, *Tin Machine* is a bracing listen–a mix of scorching electric blues and metallic hard rock, giddy in its bursts of vigour. It is prone to misfires; the rather risible title track mints a sort of Celtic hard rock, Gabrels skronking wildly and Bowie sounding more like a Bowie impersonator, ranting about "*Humping Tories/Spittle on their chins…*" But this newfound energy leads to invigorating moments. "Crack City" and "Under The God" showcase a socially conscious Bowie, perhaps atoning for aspects of his own history; the former, a Dylanesque screed that sees hedonist turned moralist, warning of the inner city hard drugs epidemic; the latter, a cautionary vision of Fascism returning, part inspired by David Dukes, a former Klansman, winning election to the Louisiana House: "*White trash picking up Nazi flags/While you were gone there was war/This is the West get used to it/They put a Swastika over the door…*"

A cover of Lennon's "Working Class Hero" is reworked as brittle funk, Gabrels shadowing Bowie's wracked vocal with screaming guitar fireworks. The highlight, though, is "Prisoner Of Love", a lovelorn desert twang with lyrical nods to Ginsberg's *Howl* that tells of obsession and ambitions thwarted.

Tin Machine won broadly positive reviews and hit No 3 in the UK chart, but while the band toured extensively, concentrating on smaller venues, sales did not hold up. EMI rejected a second Tin Machine album, so following Bowie's solo Sound + Vision tour, Tin Machine signed to Victory, who would release *Tin Machine II*. Save for a handful of stand-outs (the careening "Baby Universal"; the sensual "You Belong In Rock'n'Roll", featuring Bowie on saxophone) *II* is a dreary and indulgent listen, reaching a nadir with two dreadful songs sung by Hunt, "Stateside" and "Sorry". Released in September 1991 – the same month as Nirvana's *Nevermind*–*II* would be Bowie's first album in two decades to miss the UK Top 20, and sputtered out shy of the US Top 100.

The group continued on the road, the It's My Life tour rolling on until February 1992. But the Tin Machine experiment was not in vain. Bowie's partnership with Gabrels would continue, the guitarist loyal up until 1999's *Hours…*. In a less tangible sense, meanwhile, Tin Machine constituted a sort of wiping of the slate; a clean break between the dislocated Bowie of the mid '80s, and the more mercurial Bowie of the '90s, free to seek the future wherever it might be found.

RELEASE DATE 5 | APRIL | 1993

BLACK TIE, WHITE NOISE

A jump back into the spotlight. Bowie embraces the '90s, while slyly manipulating his own legacy. *By Mark Bentley*

BY THE EARLY 1990s, the key to Bowie's future seemed to lie in his past. The compendious reissue programme of 1990 and 1991 – all those classic albums re-released, on sparkling-sounding shiny silver discs, with attendant bonus tracks, the chart-topping *Changesbowie* compilation at its vanguard – seemed to have a restorative effect on The Cult Of David. It found him a new, younger audience, while reminding first-generation fans why they liked him so much in the first place. Bowie was no bystander in this: the accompanying Sound + Vision 'Greatest Hits' tour ("I've got to support EMI and Rykodisc and sell as many albums as I can"), signalled a man willing to reconnect with his previous selves.

Journalists filed away their Tin Machine invective and penned warm thoughts about Bowie's legacy, his contribution to music. Musicians joined the chorus: composer Philip Glass recorded his *Low Symphony* in the summer of 1992, and soon the elongated Estuary vowels of Suede's Brett Anderson, leader of the hottest band in the country, would make it explicit. Bowie and Brett even appeared on the cover of *NME* together in March 1993. "There's a quite a bit of you on this one," says Anderson earnestly, as a new Suede track plays in the background. It was official. Bowie was great, again.

He took full commercial advantage of this climate of goodwill. A single, the buoyant, clubby "Jump They Say", became his first solo outing since "Blue Jean" in 1984 to make the UK Top 10. Then came *Black Tie, White Noise*, which topped the UK album charts and displaced, with neat symmetry, Suede's *Suede*. From *Black Tie, White Noise*'s label, Arista, to its slick sound, everything about it seemed *new*, leaning heavily on the production tics of '90s pop-soul, on the bouncy beats of New Jack Swing, the Motown not of Marvin Gaye but of Boyz II Men. On first listen, it was relentless plastic R&B, and his blackest record since *Young Americans* – with just enough of the neurotic portent of classic Bowie to be reassuring. Compositional kisses to his new supermodel wife, Iman (they were married in April 1992) were everywhere, as evidenced in instrumental opener "The Wedding", and its vocal version "The Wedding Song" ("*Heaven's girl in a wedding gown… Angel for life*"). "Pallas Athena" was a slice of tasteful techno, of all things. As with the "Fame'90" single, vogueish producers like Leftfield and Brothers In Rhythm were on hand for numerous remixes. We might have wanted to look back, but David Bowie does not.

Except, of course, he does, continually. The most important remixer on *Black Tie, White Noise* is Bowie himself, drawing on his past and playing some tricksterish in-jokes at the same time. On *Black Tie, White Noise*, he covers noted disciple Morrissey: "I Know It's Gonna Happen Someday", from 1992's Mick Ronson-produced *Your Arsenal*, and a song whose structure and melody borrow extravagantly from "Rock'N'Roll Suicide". He covers the title track of The Walker Brothers' excellent 1978 *Nite Flights* album, a brackish piece of electronic balladry itself obviously influenced by Krautrock and Berlin-period Bowie. And look, there's Ronson (who died just weeks after *Black Tie, White Noise*'s release) soloing on an interpretation of Cream's "I Feel Free". Bowie apparently had personal reasons for recording that particular track – it reminded him of late-'60s nights out with his half-brother Terry – but this gleefully odd version serves principally to remind us that he'd nicked the verse melody for "Black Tie, White Noise" itself.

Meanwhile the best song on the album, the snaking, eldritch "You've Been Around", was originally written with Reeves Gabrels, for Tin Machine. It has the killer post-post-modern blow: at 2.44, when Bowie sings "*You've changed me…*", a chorus of Davids chirp in "*Ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-chaaaanged*". He'd dropped the artist's name in interviews, and now this was Bowie's musical version of Julian

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"There are five-and-a-half good songs – and bearing in mind Bowie spent most of the '80s as a laughing stock, that's an admirable achievement." JOHN HARRIS, NME, APRIL 3, 1993

"Neither diamond nor dog, this is that most awkward of conundrums for reviewers – the intermittently very good." CHRIS ROBERTS, MELODY MAKER, APRIL 3, 1993

TRACKMARKS | Black Tie, White Noise

1. **The Wedding** ★★★
2. **You've Been Around** ★★★★★
3. **I Feel Free** ★★
4. **Black Tie, White Noise** ★★★★
5. **Jump They Say** ★★★★
6. **Nite Flights** ★★★★
7. **Pallas Athena** ★★★
8. **Miracle Goodnight** ★★
9. **Don't Let Me Down & Down** ★★
10. **Looking For Lester** ★★★★
11. **I Know It's Gonna Happen Someday** ★★
12. **The Wedding Song** ★★

RELEASED: April 5, 1993
LABEL: Arista*
* In the US, the album was initially released by Savage. The label folded in June 1993.
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Nile Rodgers
RECORDED AT: Mountain Studios, Montreaux, 38 Fresh Recording Studios, LA, The Hit Factory, New York (June 1992)
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, sax, Dog alto); Nile Rodgers (guitar); Pugi Bell (drums), Sterling Campbell (drums); Barry Campbell (bass); Richard Hilton (keys); John Regan (bass); Michael Reisman (harp, tubular bells); Dave Richards, Philippe Saisse, Richard Tee (keyboards); Gerardo Velez (percussion); Fonzi Thorton, Tawatha Agee, Curtis King Jr, Dennis Collins, Brenda White-King, Maryl Epps (bk vocals); Al B. Sure! (vocals"); Mick Ronson (guitars on "I Feel Free"); Lester Bowie (trumpet); Wild T Springer (guitar)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 39

Schnabel's 'Plate Paintings', large-scale strokes on broken ceramics. Recycling pieces of his past, and making it art.

That lurching lead single "Jump They Say" – like 1970's "All The Madmen", a song about Terry, who suffered with bipolar disorder – is another case. The first b-side (Leftfield's "Hard Hands" mix) wryly samples a vox pop from *Cracked Actor*, Alan Yentob's 1974 Bowie doc. "I'm just a Space Cadet, he's the commander," coos a not-quite-there Bowie fan, and here it is looped, repeated, reworked. It's simultaneously a reminder of Bowie's previous incarnations, and his sense of humour.

The single also contains, astonishingly, an "exclusive eight-page discography" that manages to find room for such essential discographical data as "Bowie is confirmed as a musical director for a forthcoming movie [*The Delinquents*] starring Kylie Minogue, although his actual involvement will diminish". And "Sexual assault suit by [*Vanda Lee*] Nichols against Bowie is dismissed by Dallas Federal Judge". Someone is having fun with us.

And you can have fun, too, if you get past Bowie and Nile Rodgers' dated, what-does-this-button-do production. Bowie's signature braying sax – as cavernous as it had been on *Low* and *"Heroes"* – slides in and out of the album. "Looking For Lester" is unexpectedly fine, sounding like Steely Dan in residence at a Miami Beach cocktail bar. It showcases another of the album's keynote sounds – Lester Bowie's will-o'-the-wisp trumpet – and its title, as Bowie acknowledged, was another in-joke, emulating John Coltrane's "Chasing The Trane".

The lyrics, particularly on the title track, a cold-eyed dissection of the fallout from the 1992 LA Riots, manage to be characteristically elliptical and refreshingly snide: *"Reach over race and hold each other's hands/Walk thru the night singing 'We Are The World'…"*. And then, another good gag, as Bowie (and co-vocalist Al B Sure!) coolly pastiche Marvin Gaye (*"What's going on?"*), before adding, ominously: *"There'll be some blood no doubt about it…"*

"So much of this album comes from a more emotional plane than I'm wont to generally show about myself," Bowie admitted to *NME*. "There's a lot of jumping into the unknown about it…" *Black Tie, White Noise* is a two-headed Bowie oddity: an album that sounds unlike anything he'd done, but is nonetheless anchored in the materials of his past.

RELEASE DATE 8 | NOVEMBER | 1993

THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA

The experimental Bowie returns at last, with a discreet but significant TV soundtrack. *By David Cavanagh*

BOWIE'S FACE MUST have been an absolute picture as he read the opening pages of Hanif Kureishi's 1990 novel, *The Buddha Of Suburbia*. Meet the narrator: a bisexual teenager living in Bromley (!) at the turn of the '70s. Namechecked in chapter one: Syd Barrett, Marc Bolan, Jean Genet, Buddhism. Guess what his mother's name is: Margaret. By page eight, when he drops in at the Three Tuns pub (site of the Beckenham Arts Lab in 1969), Bowie must have wondered if Kureishi had been rummaging through bins.

Oh yes, Bowie was on familiar psycho-emotional territory with *The Buddha Of Suburbia*. And even if Kureishi's story took a different course to Bowie's life (Karim, the narrator, is an Indo-Brit who experiences racism and various cultural conflicts), Bowie was a natural choice to write music for BBC2's four-part adaptation in 1993. A soundtrack album was released to coincide with the series. But whereas the use of music in the series was conservative – a blend of '70s hits (T. Rex, Cockney Rebel), classic Bowie ("Changes", "Time") and unobtrusive pieces of Bowie-composed incidental music – far more fascinating was the way he approached the album, which became something quite separate and original. It began and ended with the series' title song; in between, it took a 46-minute detour into Bowie's most avant-garde material since the Berlin Trilogy.

The Buddha Of Suburbia had few champions and a short shelf life, and was deleted by Arista a few years later. Bowie later claimed it received only one review – a forgivable exaggeration. Prior to reviewing it myself, I had the notion it would consist of pastiches (arch, knowing) and not have enough songs to be classed as a proper Bowie 'work'. Then again, did we need another proper work? Some of us were still having post-traumatic stress counselling after accidentally being exposed to *Tin Machine II*. How wonderfully surprising, then, was my advance cassette of *The Buddha Of Suburbia*. This wasn't some inconsequential adjunct to the main catalogue! This was the risk-taking Bowie of old! Full of ideas, gravitas, experimentation, art!

They say that if you have to describe music as 'experimental', the experiment has failed. In Bowie's case, though, 'experimental' is nearly always meant as a compliment. His experiments create beautiful shocks, leading to "Warszawa" and "Neuköln". As we know, in the years following *Scary Monsters*, he experimented less and less. Perhaps only one single event – the 1988 ICA performance of "Look Back In Anger" with dance group La La La Human Steps – qualified as an experiment per se. *The Buddha Of Suburbia* doesn't immediately leap into foreign soundworlds, but it gets there soon enough. Its second track is based around a pumping electronic groove, a hypnotic organ line, a vocoder into which Bowie mutters something about the links between sex and religion, and, quite unexpectedly, a sax harmonising with a muted trumpet, giving a flavour of Miles Davis' "So What". That's followed by the icy synthesiser fade-in of "South Horizon", which soon mutates into a trumpet solo that turns out to be a scene-setter for the return of Mike Garson (piano). Garson spills waterfalls of black and white notes everywhere, his fingers colliding with themselves, occupying the same 'rogue element' position in Bowie's music that he did on "Aladdin Sane (1913-1938-197?)". *Buddha* has a unique way of combining old values and new: it's digital, ambient music that is just right for the spontaneous outrush of jazz. Its atmospheres sometimes lie still. And at other times they have the anarchic hilarity of a game of musical Consequences.

Bowie explains, in an uncharacteristically long sleevenote essay, that some of the key considerations in the process were juxtaposition, chance, discipline, chaos and a desire for harmonic clashes (especially "dangerous" and "attractive" ones) which he generated by pulling down the faders on the desk to make it impossible to hear the tune he was overdubbing onto. He had a crucial collaborator on the album, Erdal Kizilçay, a

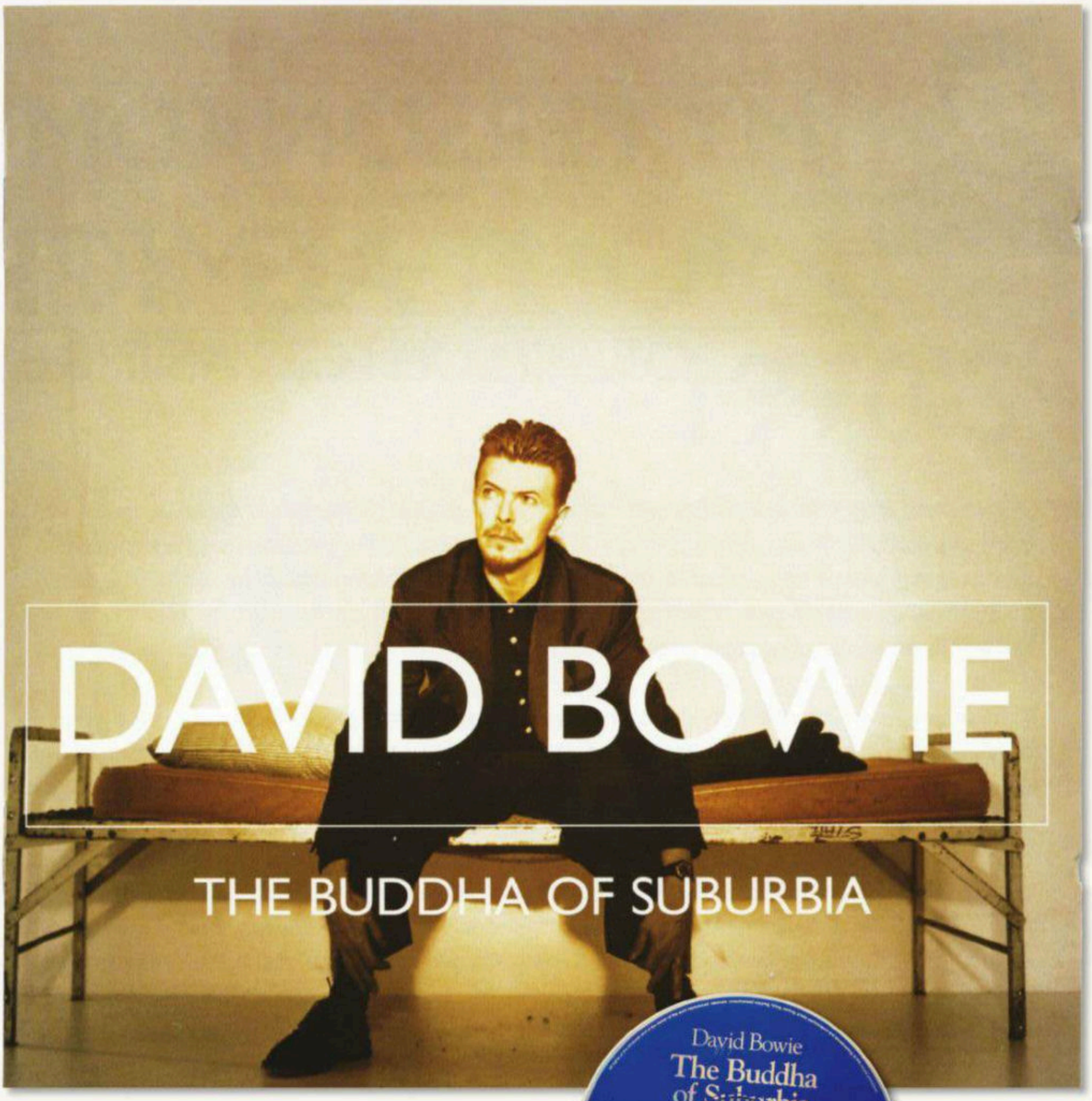
THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Bowie has a fair stab at some incidental filler with a few appropriate references but, really, there's nothing here worth forgiving him for Tin Machine."
SHAUN PHILLIPS, VOX, DECEMBER, 1993

TRACKMARKS | The Buddha Of Suburbia

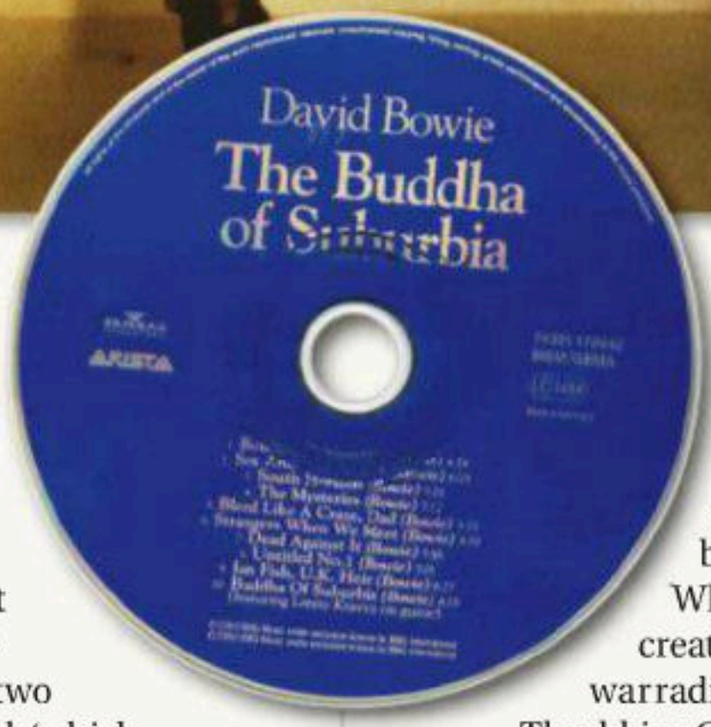
1. **Buddha Of Suburbia** ★★★★
2. **Sex And The Church** ★★★★
3. **South Horizon** ★★★★★
4. **The Mysteries** ★★★★★
5. **Bleed Like A Craze, Dad** ★★★
6. **Strangers When We Meet** ★★★
7. **Dead Against It** ★★★
8. **Untitled No. 1** ★★★★
9. **Ian Fish, UK Heir** ★★★★
10. **Buddha Of Suburbia** ★★★★

RELEASED: November 8, 1993 (October 24, 1995 in US)
LABEL: Arista
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, David Richards
RECORDED AT: Mountain Studios, Montreux, Switzerland
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, keyboard, synths, guitar, alto sax, baritone sax, keyboard percussion); Erdal Kizilçay (keyboards, trumpet, bass, guitar, drums, percussion); 3D Echo (drum, bass, guitar on "Bleed Like a Craze, Dad"); Mike Garson (piano on "Bleed Like a Craze, Dad" and "South Horizon"); Lenny Kravitz (guitar on "Buddha Of Suburbia")
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 87



Turkish multi-instrumentalist who'd moved to Switzerland and begun working with Bowie (often uncredited) in the '80s. If Kizilçay's prodigious talent as a musician opened lots of doors on *The Buddha Of Suburbia*, Garson was an obvious example of someone who was able to pass through. Garson, who plays on two tracks, doesn't sound like he's paying attention to either of them. That's because he hasn't heard them. Garson recorded his contributions alone in Burbank, sending them to Bowie and Kizilçay in Montreux, who cued up some entirely unrelated textures and beats, and then "intercut arbitrarily". In this cut-up, spliced-together methodology, it's fitting that two titles ("Bleed Like A Craze, Dad", "Ian Fish, UK Heir") resemble anagrams. The latter actually *is* an anagram, of Hanif Kureishi.

Bowie, who calls *The Buddha Of Suburbia* "a truly exciting work situation", stresses in his essay that he let himself be influenced, in the spirit of Kureishi's book, by "the stockpile of residue from the 1970s". Bowie even lists some influences (Roxy Music, The O'Jays, Kraftwerk), but *The Buddha Of Suburbia* is really only a '70s album in two senses. Firstly, the title track (which appears twice) quotes from "All The Madmen", reconnecting us to the androgynous Bowie with the complex mental history, who sprang like a cat from the suburbs. And secondly, a huge strength of *The Buddha Of Suburbia* is that it sees Bowie rediscover his gift for truly sinister instrumentals, recalling the derangement and otherness of *Low*, *"Heroes"* and *Lodger*. "The Mysteries" is spooked, tranquilised, groaning and churning, with a melody not so much plaintive as bereaved – but it's outdone for sheer indescribability by "Ian Fish, UK Heir". What the hell did they create this on? Synths? Pre-war radios? It sounds like Throbbing Gristle droning away forever in a household where everybody has been dead for 40 years.



The impetus to make *Outside* was perhaps already knocking; in his essay, Bowie praises Eno (who isn't involved here) to the skies. *The Buddha Of Suburbia* itself was reissued by EMI in 2007. It should be seen as a vitally important album, not as an appendix. It was the beginning of Bowie's Second Great Decade.

RELEASE DATE 26 | SEPTEMBER | 1995

OUTSIDE

"Art-ritual murder"? "Non-linear Gothic Drama Hyper-cycle"? Bowie recalls Eno to the "school of pretension". *By Stephen Troussé*

"ART'S A BARNYARD," writes Detective Professor Nathan Adler in the sleevenotes to David Bowie's 20th album. "It's my job to pick thru' the manure heap looking for peppercorns." The joy of *Outside* – or to give its full and proper title, *1. Outside – The Nathan Adler Diaries: A Hyper Cycle* – is that the bullshit is frequently beguiling and the peppercorns are plentiful.

Though they hadn't worked together since 1979's *Lodger*, the reunion of Bowie and Eno was always on the cards. Eno had been a guest at Bowie's wedding – indeed he delivered a typically ludic lecture on the subject at Sadler's Wells – while Bowie fulsomely acknowledged his debt to Eno in his notes to *The Buddha Of Suburbia*. More significantly, perhaps, the success of Phillip Glass's *Low Symphony* suggested that their joint stock was at an all-time high, in the art world, if not commercially.

If *Lodger* had seen their interests diverging, Eno towards the ethnosampladelia of *Bush Of Ghosts*, Bowie tacking back towards pop, *Outside* found them united in what they delighted in terming "the school of pretension". Eno's oblique strategies, which had proved so unpopular with Carlos Alomar, returned with a vengeance: the team were given detailed roles ("You are a disgruntled ex-member of a South African rock band. Play the notes you were not allowed to play") to inform initial jams; charcoal and paints were supplied to sustain the creative mood during studio downtime. Garson in particular delighted in "the most creative environment I have ever been in", while Bowie enthused over three-hour improv sessions. Within weeks they had recorded over 35 hours of music.

It should all have been a monstrously indulgent farrago. And this was pretty much the opinion of labels Bowie tried to interest in early recordings. While he had been able to force through an apparently commercially suicidal album like *Low* under the terms of his contract, trying to sell such a project as a free agent was a different matter. Whether as potential selling-point or pragmatic framework, a narrative began to emerge. Inspired by a timely combination of *Twin Peaks*, Damien Hirst and the Jim Rose Circus, Bowie plotted the most grandiose concept album of all time: Leon was to be a three-hour "non-linear Gothic Drama Hyper-cycle", detailing the "art-ritual murder" of Baby Grace Blue in a parallel New Jersey consumed by esoterrorist artists high on neuropharmaceuticals and neopaganism. He was eventually persuaded to compromise, and *Outside* was presented as merely the first episode in a sequence that would occupy the next five years, culminating in a fabulous spectacle of fin-de-siècle epic theatre on Millennium Eve. In 1995, this was, at the very least, an entertaining alternative to Britpop.

It proved to be so much more. Choose to ignore the byzantine conceptualism and varispeeded funny voices, experience it purely as music, and *Outside* is the most impressive and affecting Bowie record in years. You might first realise this coming upon "The Heart's Filthy Lesson" unexpectedly over the credits of the movie *Se7en*. Cut loose from *Outside*'s overbearing framework, pounding out of cinema speakers in the wake of David Fincher's own high-concept murder mystery, the track

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"An over-stuffed, ungainly, confusing, preposterous, kinky and occasionally inspirational folly... A long way from rock'n'roll career suicide."
ROGER MORTON, NME, SEPTEMBER 23, 1995

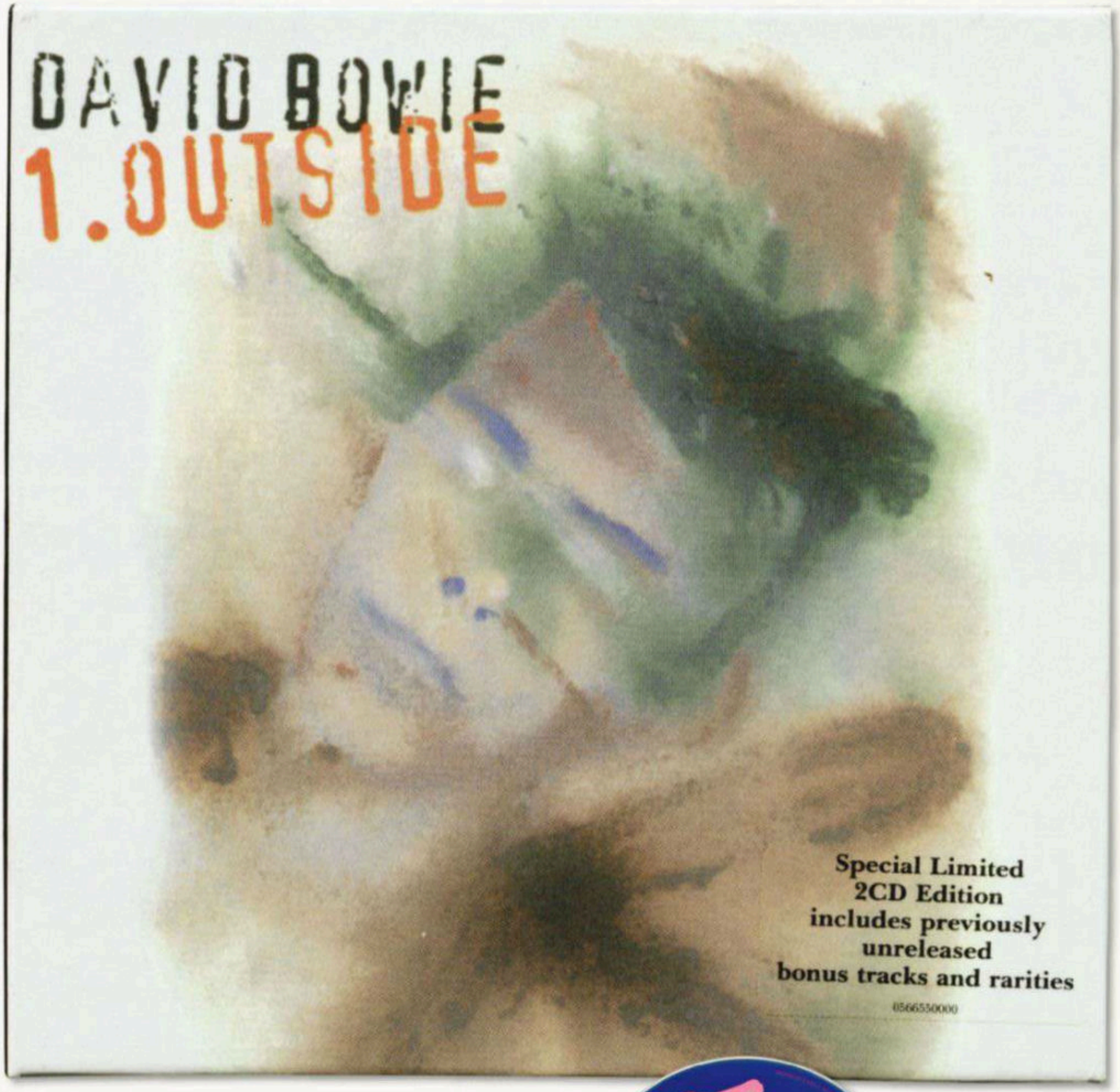
"He is poised to be a healthy influence on a fifth generation of glamorous chameleons."
PAUL LESTER, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 14, 1995

TRACKMARKS | Outside

1. Leon Takes Us Outside ★★★★
2. Outside ★★★★
3. The Heart's Filthy Lesson ★★★★★
4. A Small Plot Of Land ★★★★
5. Segue – Baby Grace (A Horrid Cassette) ★★
6. Hallo Spaceboy ★★★★
7. The Motel ★★★★
8. I Have Not Been To Oxford Town ★★★★★
9. No Control ★★★★★
10. Segue – Algeria Touch-shriek ★★
11. The Voyeur Of Utter Destruction (As Beauty) ★★★★
12. Segue – Ramona A. Stone/I Am with Name ★★★
13. Wishful Beginnings ★★★★
14. We Prick You ★★★
15. Segue – Nathan Adler ★★
16. I'm Deranged ★★★★
17. Thru' These Architects Eyes ★★★★
18. Segue – Nathan Adler ★★
19. Strangers When We Meet ★★★

RELEASED: September 26, 1995
LABEL: Artista/BMG
PRODUCED BY David Bowie, Brian Eno and David Richards
RECORDED AT Mountain Studios, Montreux, Switzerland
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, saxophone, guitar, keyboards); Brian Eno (synthesisers, treatments, strategies); Reeves Gabrels (guitar); Erdal Kizilcay (bass, keyboards); Mike Garson (grand piano); Sterling Campbell (drums); Carlos Alomar (rhythm guitar); Joey Barron (drums); Yossi Fine (bass); Tom Frish (additional guitar on "Strangers When We Meet"); Kevin Armstrong (additional guitar on "Thru' These Architect's Eyes); Bryony, Lola, Josey and Ruby Edwards (background vocals on "The Heart's Filthy Lesson" and "I Am With Name")

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 8; US 21



sounded simply magnificent: brutal, industrial beats, splashed with Garson's intoxicated piano, while Bowie croons elliptical but nevertheless affecting lines of elegant despair: "*If there were only something between us/Other than our clothes.*"

In fact, isolated in this way, *Outside* contains some of the best, most underappreciated pop songs of Bowie's career. "I Have Not Been To Oxford Town", riding on a fabulous Carlos Alomar riff, suggests what *Remain In Light* might have sounded like if Bowie were the singer in Talking Heads, while "Hallo Spaceboy", built upon a piledriving Reeves Gabrel riff and an Eno fantasy of an orbital nightclub, is irresistibly relentless. Remixed by the Pet Shop Boys, who spliced the track with scrambled lines from "Space Oddity", it again suggested that Bowie was accelerating toward some terminal career vortex, his past selves and memories returned, reconfigured, whirling around in mad simultaneity.

Hear the album in this context and what is the Baby Grace segue "Horrid Cassette", with Bowie's voice treated to approximate the last words of a 14-year-old girl, but the ghost of all the intimations of insanity, the laughing gnomes and Bewlay brothers, returned in a particularly grisly guise? Or the monologue of "Algeria Touchshriek" – Bowie's geriatric cracked-actor cockney turn – but the spectre of another child-murder, the singer of the very early "Please Mr Gravedigger"?

When he's not varispeeded and warped, *Outside* is also Bowie's finest vocal record since *Scary Monsters*. The beautifully brooding "No Control" finds him perfecting the Scott Walker tenor he'd been essaying since at least his cover of "Nite Flites" on *Black Tie, White Noise*, while "A Small Plot Of Land", despite its hyperactive Garson piano, is eerily reminscent of a Walker track like "Farmer In The City". *Tilt* actually appeared while *Outside* was still being conceived, terrifying Bowie and Eno that it would blow their efforts out of the water before they'd even finished. In fact the two albums are curiously complimentary, *Outside* exuberantly chaotic while *Tilt* is austerely aloof, but both the work of revitalised elder statesmen, shaming the Britpop pups who idolised them both, by continuing to reimagine what a pop album could be at the end of an exhausted century.

RELEASE DATE 03 | FEBRUARY | 1997

EARTHLING

Dismayed by Britpop traditionalism, Bowie applies to join the junglist massive – and just about gets away with it. *By Sam Richards*

WHEN AN AGEING rocker announces that he's fallen in love with a hot new sound sweeping the clubs, eyes are liable to roll skyward, for that way lies Paul Weller's house record, Mick Jagger's disco period and Perry Farrell's excruciating attempt to rebrand himself as DJ Peretz.

So when David Bowie, a few months shy of his 50th birthday, revealed that his new album would be informed by the belligerent pirate radio sound of jungle and drum'n'bass, even hardcore Bowiephiles braced themselves for the worst. However, with a little bit of chutzpah and a lot of charm, Bowie just about got away with a bizarre musical merger.

By 1996, dance music culture in the UK had gone mainstream. It was the era of the superclub, with 'handbag house' hits in the charts, Goa trance at the festivals, drum'n'bass for the urban underground and electronica (or "intelligent dance music") for the connoisseurs. Crossover acts such as Underworld, The Prodigy and The Chemical Brothers were even making inroads into in the US via the alternative rock scene, a development noted by Bowie's guitarist and collaborator Reeves Gabrels: "I felt everybody was looking around them, musically, and thought, 'Fuck it, it's the end of the millennium and we're still playing like we're in The Rolling Stones,'" he said to Bowie biographer Paul Trynka in *Starman*. "We've got to get on this, otherwise people are gonna look back at us and say we were lame."

Combining rapid-fire breakbeats with dub basslines and elements from ragga and dancehall, jungle was originally the glowering, urban reaction to hippy-dippy acid house euphoria. By 1996, though – by which time the sound was more widely known as drum'n'bass – smoother, jazz-inflected productions by the likes of Goldie, LTJ Bukem and Omni Trio could frequently be heard on film soundtracks and TV commercials, as well in the clubs. It was easy to see the sound's attraction to a pop culture magpie like Bowie, but harder to envisage how he'd be able to lever it into a rock context. Drum'n'bass was antithetical to the traditional tenets of rock'n'roll, with its breakneck tempos, shredded beats and emphasis on bassline and texture rather then melody and message. Most attempts of the era to meld drum'n'bass and rock yielded fairly unpleasant results (witness Goldie and Noel Gallagher's "Temper Temper") and Bowie's first efforts were inauspicious.

Made available via his website in September 1996 – and thus becoming the first ever downloadable single by a major artist – "Telling Lies" was an uncomfortable collision of styles, the frantic drum'n'bass beats working at cross-purposes to the song's brooding goth dynamics. However, accompanying remixes by acid house pioneer turned drum'n'bass evangelist A Guy Called Gerald and rising techstep star Adam F – ironically the son of the Butlins Bowie, Alvin Stardust – showed that Bowie was mixing in the right circles.

His solution was not to take the cross-pollination process too seriously. "Little Wonder", *Earthling*'s second single, was a simple, jaunty pop song strapped, almost against its will, to a pummelling rhythm track. Rather than attempting to broker a lame compromise, it sounds like Ziggy Stardust has been beamed directly into the moshpit at a Prodigy gig and left to fend for himself. Meanwhile, the audacious moment when the whole song drops into a half-speed rock grind predates Pendulum's signature trick by a decade.

Not all of *Earthling*'s gonzoid stylistic fusions

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

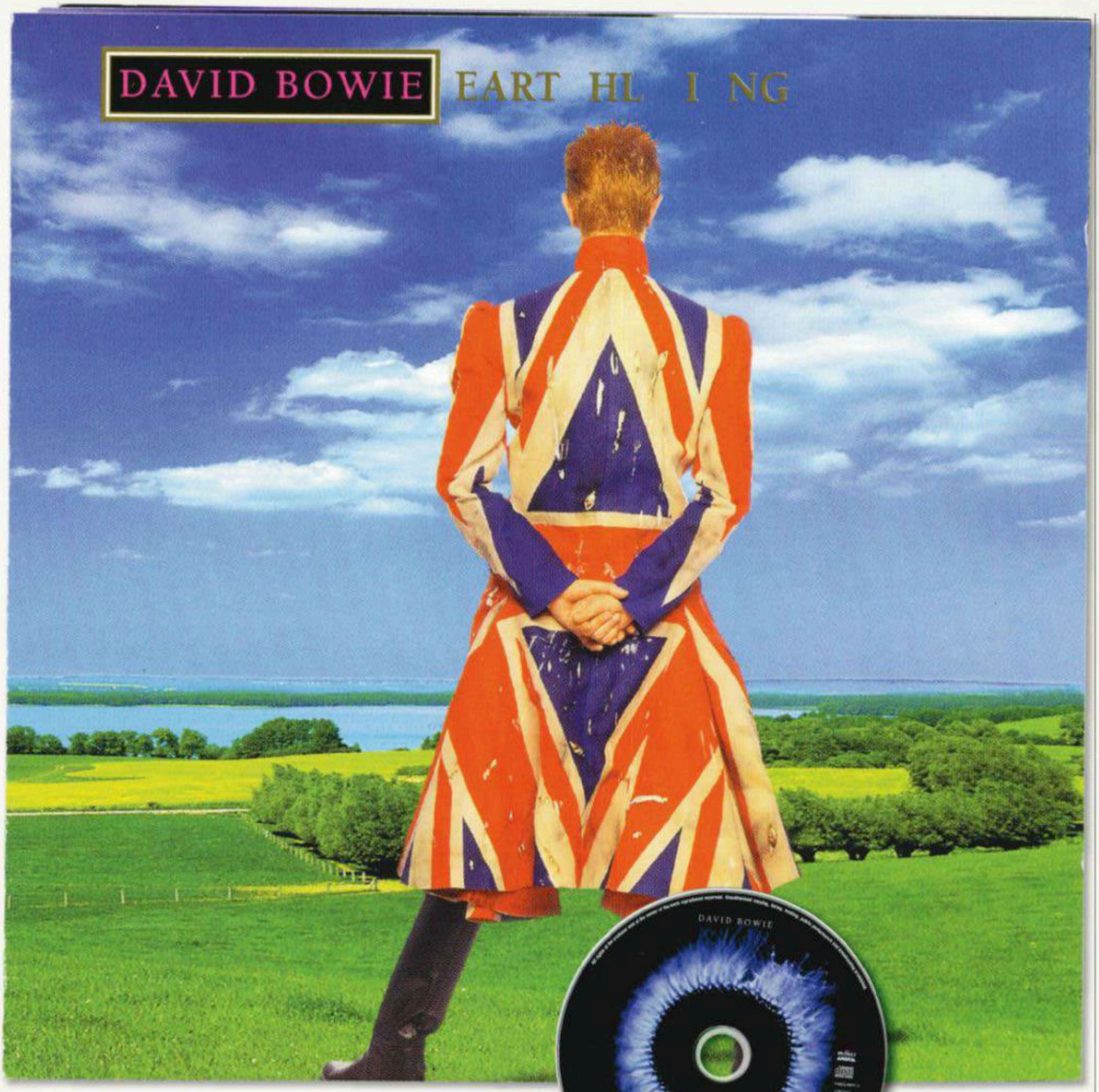
"For all its relative spontaneity and half-decent ideas, there is a reassuring shitload of pretension and awful ideas... He's still trying far, far too hard."
JOHN MULVEY, NME, FEBRUARY 1, 1997

"Frenetic, fractured, urgent, excitable (flawed? Certainly), neon, chaotic, cyberreal... Sexy?... Here we have a rigorous roughing-over of The Rock Dynamic."
DAVE SIMPSON, MELODY MAKER, FEBRUARY 8, 1997

TRACKMARKS | Earthling

1. **Little Wonder** ★★★★
2. **Looking For Satellites** ★★★
3. **Battle For Britain (The Letter)** ★★★
4. **Seven Years In Tibet** ★★★★
5. **Dead Man Walking** ★★
6. **Telling Lies** ★★
7. **The Last Thing You Should Do** ★★
8. **I'm Afraid Of Americans (Nine Inch Nails V1 Mix)** ★★★
9. **Law (Earthlings On Fire)** ★

RELEASED: February 3, 1997
LABEL: BMG
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Mark Plati, Reeves Gabrels
RECORDED AT: Looking Glass Studio, New York City
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, alto saxophone, samples, keyboards); Reeves Gabrels (programming, synthesisers, real and sampled guitars, vocals); Mark Plati (programming, loops, samples, keyboards); Gail Ann Dorsey (bass, vocals); Zachary Alford (drum loops, acoustic drums, electronic percussion); Mike Garson (keyboards, piano)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 6; US 39



work so well. The hectic rhythms and crunching guitars of "Battle For Britain (The Letter)" don't appear to add much to what could otherwise have been a nicely curdled ballad with a whiff of "The Man Who Sold The World" about it, while "Dead Man Walking" is another half-decent song bolted awkwardly to an inappropriately pumping techno beat before being battered to death by the kitchen sink. Still, at least it sounds like Bowie's having fun. Excess is much more excusable when the tongue of the performer is somewhere near their cheek, and it's hard to imagine Bowie signing off the ludicrously over-the-top guitar solo of "Looking For Satellites" or the vaudeville piano breakdown of "Battle For Britain" without a grin on his face.

So while *Earthling* deals with many of the same themes as its earnest predecessor *Outside* – information overload and the commodification of culture – it made more headway with its wry, ironical approach: "*Nowhere … shampoo … TV … combat*" runs the deadpan refrain of the oddly catchy electro-waltz "Looking For Satellites", which raises the curious spectre of Bowie aping U2 aping Bowie.

"Little Wonder" aside, the best thing on the album is probably "Seven Years In Tibet", a pleasantly downbeat rumination on the meaninglessness of it all, complete with a gnashing chorus and Bowie crooning glumly, "*I drink in the shadows of an evening sky/ See nothing at all*", is rather affecting. In fact the song's extended coda, with its drunken Wurlitzers and maudlin fanfares, sounds rather a lot like Blur. Perhaps this was Bowie's acknowledgement of that *other* significant British cultural moment of the mid-'90s (along with the hideous Alexander McQueen-designed Union Jack frockcoat he sports on the album cover).

Unsurprisingly, the US didn't really understand "Little Wonder", but it did take to the slick industrial pop of "I'm Afraid Of Americans". Remixed with the US alt.rock market in mind by Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails, with whom Bowie had toured in 1995, it's glib, but nicely crafted.

Which is more than you can say for the wretched closing track "Law (Earthlings On Fire)" which features a voice shouting "*I don't want knowledge, I want certainty!*" over a cacophony of 808 squiggles and proto nu-metal guitars.

A reminder, perhaps, that Bowie's dance-rock experiments, while more enjoyable than many observers expected, were always one wrong turn from catastrophe.

"FOR ALL THE TIMES I MAKE MYSELF LOOK A PRANNY, I ALSO DO THINGS I KNOW ARE GOOD..."

1997, and drum'n'bass is, apparently, "the future of rock!" STEPHEN DALTON finds the feisty and rejuvenated 50-year-old blasting Britpop traditionalism and Bowie copycats. "But then I think about all the things I've stolen," he says, "so it's not my job to get possessive..."

CORBIS

Forget that he's 50! Bowie live with Lou Reed at Bowie's birthday, Madison Square Garden, 1997

TAKEN FROM
NME
01/02/1997

DAVID BOWIE LOOKS bloody awful. Bloated and hunched, he spills out of his leather trousers as he hobbles across the New York street. For some reason, he's chosen to greet the *NME* in the black-shades-and-quiff ensemble from his schlocky sex-vampire flick *The Hunger*. What a mess.

Hang on. *That's* not Bowie, just a dodgy lookalike. No, here comes David now, a willowy bottle-blond wrapped in the expensive pastel suitage of his "Let's Dance" era, looking dapper and healthy and tanned. Now that's more like it… but, erm, it's not actually him. Arse.

Aha! A waistcoated zombie with skeleton cheeks and piercing eyes. Nope, the eyes are matching colours. Damn. That corkscrew-haired hippy boho with the acoustic guitar? Oops, sorry madam. Perhaps that orange-haired android in the spider-web catsuit…? Pah! Funny outfit for a pizza delivery job.

Of all the places to meet, El Ziggo goes and chooses Greenwich Village, official home to most of the world's worst Bowie clones. And here's another one, not quite so convincing, a spiky-haired geezer in a fake English tea shop ranting away in Virtual Cockney at the gawping passers-by.

"Fuck off! Get out of it! Ha ha ha!" he barks. Oh Dear – a New York nutter.

"Look at THIS one, what IS he doing?" He continues. "Run that man over, somebody! Push him under that car! Ha ha!"

But this, of course, is your genuine David Bowie. Sure, it's confusing these days, but there are tell-tale signs. Apart from these outbursts at passing fans, there's an almost tangible forcefield of superstar charisma hanging over the slight, carrot-topped little feller. Which isn't surprising since, at 50, Bowie's been famous for significantly longer than he hasn't. And for all the passing Ziggy Stardusts and Thin White Dukes outside, there's no mistaking the real thing. You see, he looks exactly like David Bowie. Only older.

Everybody's a bit Bowie these days, aren't they? Not just pop stars with their pick'n'mix musical and sexual agendas, but ordinary earthlings, too.

Think about it. How many of your friends have either (a) 'experimented' with their sexuality? (b) changed their hairstyle and colour several times in rapid succession? (c) worn daft baggy trousers and read all those crap William Burroughs books? (d) flirted with fascism, given up drugs, moved to Switzerland and married a supermodel?

Spooky, isn't it?

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

The infamous 'Bowie Bonds' offered the opportunity to invest in Bowie's pre-1990 catalogue. The asset-backed securites bonds initially made Bowie $55m, but they weren't a great long-term investment: in 2004 the bonds were reclassified by Moody's Investors with a Baa3 rating: one step above junk status.

That's because, for every suburban misfit and teenage wannabe between 1971 and 1983, David Bowie was God. He proved that small-town nobodies could reinvent themselves as pan-sexual rock messiahs like Ziggy, slicked-back soul donkeys like the Duke and art-crazed electro boffins like, erm, Brian Eno. Bowie was the bridge between Warhol's prefabricated superstars and the plastic personae of punk. He changed the vocabulary of pop forever.

Then came the '80s. Dear oh dear. Bowie released multi-platinum pop-funk opus *Let's Dance* in 1983 and claimed he was just a normal, healthy, heterosexual bloke. He appeared in glorified muppet movies. He raked in dosh on the stadium circuit while his music went down the toilet. Did he care? Not a jot. He grew a mullet and lost the plot big time. Tin Machine? Say no more.

In the '90s, though, Bowie has pulled off perhaps the most bizarre U-turn of his shape-shifting, 30-year career. He reunited with Nile Rodgers and Brian Eno for his most listenable albums in years, 1993's *Black Tie, White Noise* and 1995's *Outside*. He began seeking out new music again and namechecking the likes of the Pixies, Suede and Tricky. Then he started

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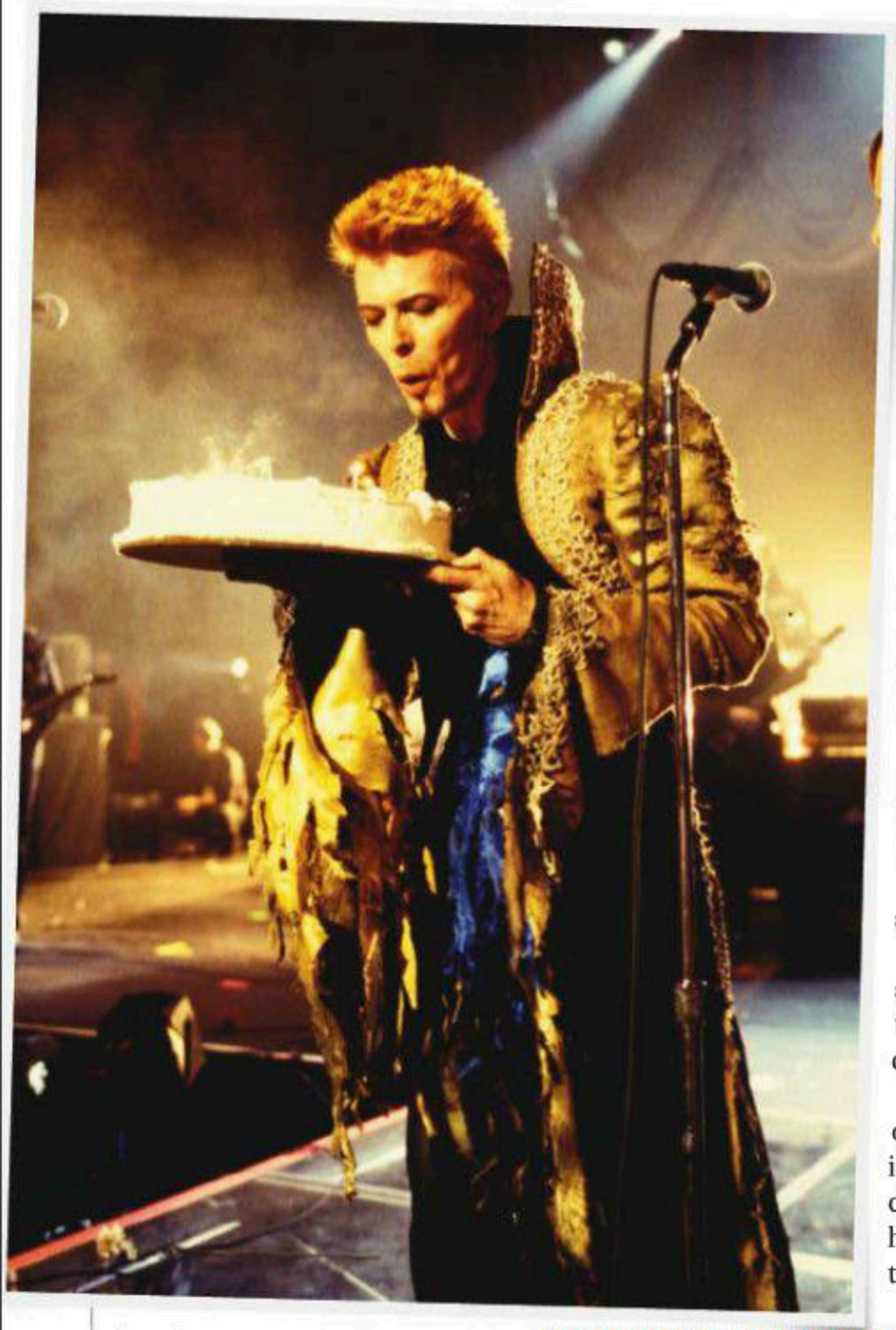


hanging out with them.

In the meantime, endorsements from America's post-grunge royalty helped revive David's tattered reputation, especially after Nirvana covered his vintage gem "The Man Who Sold The World". Bowie repaid the compliment three weeks ago with a monster birthday party at New York's Madison Square Garden featuring guest slots by Billy Corgan, Frank Black, Foo Fighters and Sonic Youth.

Lou Reed also turned up, sharing a stage with Bowie for the first time in 23 years. Bowie helped launch Reed's career in Britain and produced his milestone *Transformer* album in 1972, but the two famously fell out after a punch-up in a Kensington restaurant in 1979. [*See Stop Me... p178*]

"It was romantically written up as a punch-up, I think it was more of a slapping match!" gurgles Bowie. "I remember there was an awful lot of, 'Let me get at him... [*whispered*] hold me back!'"

Dave and Lou finally buried the hatchet a couple of years ago.

"So many things have changed in both our lives, and we're both just more open to other people than we were before. We knock around a lot, actually. Laurie [Anderson] and my wife, Lou and myself go to the theatre and all that bourgeois stuff."

Yes, there's no getting away from it. Bowie's a happily married 50-year-old culture junkie these days. He gave up drugs 20 years ago, alcohol a decade ago and horrible mullet rock about, oooh, 15 minutes ago. The man who once surfed the furthest extremes of chemical psychosis now surfs the internet and skis in his spare time. He's disgustingly healthy and ridiculously keen about his music. The bastard.

Now, according to press reports. David's even planning to raise millions by floating his back catalogue on the Stock Market. Pardon?

"You know I'm not going to discuss that, don't you?" he grins. "I don't talk about my personal finances."

But what if we want to buy shares in you?

"You can't buy shares, the story's wrong. It's not about that, it's something far more complicated."

Crumbs. This is the only occasion Bowie clams up in our interview. The rest of the time, despite the hovering presence of his famously protective long-term personal assistant Coco Schwab, he's all matey humour and disarming self-mockery. If this is an act, as many claim, it's a finely honed one.

"I REALISE SO MUCH OF WHAT I DO RUBS PEOPLE UP THE WRONG WAY, BUT IT'S JUST THE WAY I AM..."

We're here to talk about 50 years of Bowie. But we're also here to ask, on behalf of all disillusioned former Bowiephiles, why Dave didn't die at 29 and spare us all those rubbish records and terrible haircuts?

"Absolutely," he nods, "I UNDERSTAND from a mythological basis that's the right thing. But for me personally it's actually not been an option! Ha ha ha! No, I realise that so much of what I do is really uncomfortable and rubs people up the wrong way, but I don't know how else to deal with things. It's just the way I am.

"I mean, for all the times that I make myself look a pranny, I also do things that I *know* are good. And unfortunately you have to go through the pranny-making process to get to anything good. You've got to make mistakes and once you get past that, it's a lot easier because you say, 'I'm going to make a lot of mistakes but I know if I keep going, there's something really exciting in here and I've got to follow it – I don't CARE what people think and I WILL wear these trousers', ha ha ha!"

Bowie's latest trousers are of a drum'n'bass design. Don't laugh, but Dave's gone jungle.

His first jungular single, "Telling Lies", mixed by A Guy Called Gerald, was released on the internet last year. But that was just a low-key taster for his new album *Earthling*, a howling great blast of industrial jungle.

A completely barmy career move, of course, but somehow quite impressive in its audacity. And believe it or not, drum'n'bass seems to have refreshed Bowie's muse. *Earthling* contains some of his most melodic, simple and accessible songs since *Let's Dance*, coupled to some of his most arse-grindingly abrasive noises since 1980's *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*. Hummable populism and avant-garde awkwardness: the exact formula behind almost every classic prime-time Bowie album. *Earthling* truly is David's best for 15 years, and jungle seems to have been the key.

"When I first heard jungle I just thought, 'God, this is one of the most exciting forms I've ever heard. It's the future of rock!'" gushes Bowie. "I guess it's how rock was for the generation behind me, when it kicked in around '56 and everyone thought, 'What is THAT?!!' I'm still like that, still fan-like enough that when I hear something really new I go, 'I don't wanna be here, I wanna be THERE.' I recall exactly the same feelings the first time I heard The Who. That's what jungle did for me."

Bowie's enthusiasm seems genuine, but surely he knows he's going to get slammed as a desperate old has-been jumping on the drum'n'bass wagon?

"It's difficult," he sighs. "I mean, Photek, I wonder how that kiddie got into it. Maybe he was a black kid born in the Caribbean..."

Erm, isn't he a white fella from West London?

"Yeah, but you know what I mean. He's from Ipswich, actually. But I'm not sure what my 'beat' is – if jungle's not my beat, what is? I don't think you can be that territorial over a beat. In five, six years it'll be forgotten exactly what or who the roots of jungle were.

"At this moment it's such tight ownership that anybody who infringes on that ownership, unless they have the authentification of at least living in the city where it was founded or being in the right age group, they're going to be terribly suspect."

David's current single, "Little Wonder", sounds somewhat Prodigy-esque. But didn't the Prodge turn down a mooted collaboration on the grounds that Bowie was old and irrelevant?

"I don't know about that because the encounters I've had with them, they're really nice guys," says David. "We worked about four festivals together in Europe and we got on really well, particularly Keith. They didn't strike me as being obsessed about ego or anything."

CONTINUES OVER»

Taxi for *Earthlings*: Bowie with Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor, who remixed "I'm Afraid Of Americans"

So you haven't had any flak from dance purists yet?

"No, but I expect it when the album comes out. But honestly, I really don't care. Why should I, because I know how good it is. What I've done is a lot better than the stuff that I've been buying, frankly. There's only a few records I think are really good, a lot of them are really naff, and I think they have less right to be in jungle than I do."

Do you actually *dance*?

"As well as any other Englishman..."

Oh dear – that bad?

"And better than most Americans, ha ha! If you think the English can't dance, you want to see most Americans – or most white Americans."

So you're not out having it large with the junglist massive every weekend?

"No, never. I guess it's for many reasons – being married, not going barmy any more, not drinking, working too hard..."

...Being a famous rock star.

"No no, that's never bothered me. Like, I'm going to Irving Plaza this week because Tricky's on and I want to catch him with A Guy Called Gerald DJing. But on the whole, I get everything I want just by buying the music I like. It's about the music, not the physicality of dancing. I just like constructing the beat, the rhythmic machine inside it – that's what I get off on."

However unlikely the notion of Bowie "getting off" on jungle might sound, he's probably better placed than any other 50-year-old rock donkey to pull off such a conversion. After all, for most of the '70s and early-'80s, he pioneered a magpie approach to musical influences which subsequently became the norm in pop. In other words, he stole from everyone worth stealing from. In turn, he was hugely influential on several generations of rockers who copied his ideas.

Even Bowie himself is influenced by early Bowie these days. Indeed, his latest dancefloor dalliances could be seen as a continuation of the groundbreaking electronic tinkering on his Eno-produced Berlin albums, *Low* and *"Heroes"*. Released in 1977 at the height of punk, this masterful duo probably remain David's most enduringly influential works. Not only did they lay down the blueprint for '80s electropop and much early techno, they recently inspired two classical symphonies by Philip Glass and, arguably, a wholesale image change for U2. Right?

"I don't know what to say," he smirks. "Bono gets away with murder because he's got a great wit and he's a right charmer."

RUMOURS FROM GROUND CONTROL

Fag ashes to ashes: in December 1997, David was interviewed by Pulp's Jarvis Cocker for a special edition of *The Big Issue*, edited by Brit Art's enfant terrible Damien Hirst. The topic of discussion was cigarettes. "I saw it once as a prop on stage, now I smoke on stage just because I need one." He gave up smoking in early 2004.

Maybe, but look at the facts. U2 switched from Americanised rock'n'roll to European electronic alienation, decamped to Berlin, booked the SAME STUDIO and the SAME PRODUCER as you. Like, Ground Control to Major Similarity or what? They nicked an earlier chapter of your career!

"Ha ha ha! But you know something? I've FINISHED with it! They can have it! No, there have been some artists and bands that have done things that I've got momentarily possessive about. But then I think about all the things I've stolen, so it's not my job to get possessive. I co-opt as much as the next person. As Picasso said, it's not what you steal, it's how you use it."

When Bowie moved to Berlin in the mid-'70s, he was a druggy burn-out seeking spiritual salvation. After developing a serious cocaine habit and a dangerous occult fixation in Los Angeles, his mental health seemed to be disintegrating rapidly. During one infamous *Rolling Stone* interview, he hallucinated bodies falling past the window. He made some idiotic comments about Hitler and gave his notorious Nazi salute-style greeting at Victoria Station. Barmy stuff

GETTY

which he's been apologising for ever since.

The Berlin move, Bowie insists, was partly to quit drugs and partly to pursue his lifelong love of German Expressionism. But hang on – surely settling in the former capital of the Third Reich was also rooted in David's dodgy fascist obsession?

"Blindingly, no. I don't know how I've got the nerve to say that, but it really wasn't. All that had come from the '74, '75 period, welling up Manley P Hall and the Theosophy Society and the Holy Grail and my descent into the Kabbalah..."

Ah yes, the Mad Merlin period.

There are some scary biographical anecdotes from Bowie's Hollywood daze. Does he remember the swimming pool exorcism which left a devil-shaped mark...?

"...On the bottom of the pool? Yeah, and I bet it's there to this day. I do remember that because it was such an indelibly real thing at the time."

So were you involved in actual devil worship?

"Not devil worship, no, it was pure, straightforward, old-fashioned magic."

The Aleister Crowley variety?

"No, I always thought Crowley was a charlatan. But there was a guy called Edward Waite who was terribly important to me at the time. And another called Dion Fortune who wrote a book called *Psychic Self Defence*. You had to run around the room getting bits of string and old crayons and draw funny things on the wall, and I took it all most seriously, ha ha! I drew gateways into different dimensions, and I'm quite sure that, for myself, I really walked into other worlds. I drew things on walls and just walked through them, and saw what was on the other side!"

Was this perception perhaps coloured by all the cocaine you were taking?

"Well, yes, but you're not supposed to say that, ha ha! That's the thing, in combination it was just catastrophic. Because I'm very hyper at the best of times, so me on all that stuff was just... madness."

Within 10 minutes of meeting David Bowie, he's quoting Alan Bennett. Frankly, this is more impressive than two dozen coke-crazed anecdotes about Iggy and Lou. For all his mid-Atlantic manners, it also proves that David is still, in the best sense, an Englishman abroad.

So whose death affected him more – Kurt Cobain's or Peter Cook's?

"Peter Cook's, without a doubt. I knew him a little and there was a real sadness in his life. And of course he meant so much to me in terms of growing up, the way he looked at the world, his lessons in irreverence were really important to my generation... in all its seeming unfairness, what Britain is very good at is keeping people re-evaluating their own standards in a hostile and quite cruel fashion."

Is Britain still your harshest critic?

Bowie pauses. "Poland's tough," he deadpans. "And don't talk to me about Albania, those bastards!"

Even today, even after Tin Machine and his other '80s disasters, Bowie's influence still runs deep in his homeland. In fact, he's probably the only common link across the entire Britpop premier league, from Pulp's artfully posed classicism to Blur's space-cockney alienation to the glam-yob roars of Oasis and Suede. Does David hear himself in these artists?

"Oh yeah, but I hear lots of people. It's pleasant, but it doesn't stimulate me in the way that a radical new form does."

Britpop doesn't grab you like jungle does then?

"No, because I don't yet see the germ of a truly different vocabulary there. I understand what they're doing in terms of that ironic, grabbing-things-from-the-past and utilising them. In fact, some of them are just working in a very British tradition. Pulp, for instance. I think Jarvis works in an extremely traditional form, and he does it very well. But it's like the Stones – I like them as people but I don't like their music much, it doesn't mean anything to me. They're traditionalists."

"WITH BRITPOP, I DON'T SEE THE GERM OF A TRULY DIFFERENT VOCABULARY THERE. IT'S TRADITIONAL..."

Didn't Bowie's publishers have a dust-up with Oasis about Noel's use of "All The Young Dudes" in "Whatever"?

"Yeah, that's what I was told. I don't actually know about that because when I heard the idea, I was chuffed and I thought it was a shame it never happened... obviously! Ha ha! They should do lots of my old songs! Ha ha ha!"

Some reasons to hate David Bowie in 1997.

He's a hollow irrelevance who hasn't made a great record in years; he's used up all his good ideas and is currently resting on past glory; he's piggy-backing on the credibility of more cutting-edge artists; for all his arty rhetoric, he's a hammy Broadway trouper of the Judy Garland school; he's 50 years old, for arse's sake!

Well, maybe. Except that, apart from the last statement, all of these criticisms originated in old *NME*s from the period 1972 to 1980, an era now unanimously regarded as Bowie's heyday. Basically, the man's always been a faker, a dilettante and a ponce. The only difference is, now he's a 50-year-old ponce. People grow older – get used to it.

David Bowie's real problem is this: where can you go after your stint as the most influential rock artist of your generation is over? When you've guided millions of teens through adolescence and, as Scott Walker said on Radio 1's Bowie birthday tribute recently, "freed so many artists", what role remains for you?

In a way, Bowie's a victim of his own success. Of course he doesn't mean as much as he did in the '70s – how could he? But he's still pushing his own personal boundaries, and you can be sure he'll wear plenty more terrible trousers before he's through.

Hating Bowie in 1997 means hating everything overblown, theatrical, pretentious, pseudo-intellectual and jarringly progressive in the past 25 years of pop. In other words, everything great about pop. It also means hating yourself. After all, let's face it, everyone's a bit David Bowie nowadays.

Bowie as Andy Warhol in 1996 film *Basquiat* – with Jeffrey Wright, Gary Oldman and Dennis Hopper

RELEASE DATE 04 | OCTOBER | 1999

HOURS...

After the dance-rock frenzy, Bowie slows down for millennium's end. Funny how time slips away... *By David Cavanagh*

BOWIE WAS NOW 52. Floppy, Keanu Reeves-style hair fell either side of his face. The pixie goatee and red-tinged stubble from the *Earthling* period had gone. Trust Bowie to look more handsome as Y2K approached. While the world waited to see if its computers would explode in the final split-second of the millennium, what affairs did Bowie address on his October 1999 album *Hours...*? Not bugs or data. Not event horizons. No, mostly dreams of ravens and separation; and the guy in the mirror, with his floppy hair and penetrating eyes.

After two juddering albums of basslines and drum loops, *Hours...* took a step back from the drum'n'bass abyss into softer, more pillowy sensations. *Outside* and *Earthling* had threatened to dislodge the screws from our speakers; *Hours...* was the chillout after all that clubbing and caning.

It began at a tuneful trip-hop lope ("Thursday's Child"), floating on a waveless sea. Angelo Badalamenti would have approved of the dreamlike synths, and the backing vocals (American singer Holly Palmer) were delectable. Bowie, captain of the vessel, had cut all the engines and disconnected the radio. But this wasn't to guarantee serenity. Although *Hours...* remains one of his 'slowest' albums, his mind is not tranquil. Strange visions trouble him. He's visited by Roeg-ian flashbacks: "*I remember how he wept/On a bridge of violent people/I was small enough to cry.*" A father-and-son moment from Bowie's childhood? Surely not. But he doesn't elaborate and we're not encouraged to ask. The next line he sings is: "*I've got seven days to live my life or seven ways to die.*" A man with only a week to live is a powerful image, and he could easily be the narrator of several of these songs. Bowie has filleted the texts of finer detail, going for a murky atmosphere of anxiety in which nature is premonitory ("*black-eyed ravens*", "*vermillion sky*") and people weep for reasons that are never explained. Nobody can think of words to say, or remember what was said to them in the past. A man's time is running out, yet his life is as silent and empty as a scene from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

It's not so much that *Hours...* (the title is sometimes written as *'hours...'*) is open to interpretation. It's more the case that, if the listener *doesn't* interpret it, he or she will get nothing out of it. The album is not highly rated by many Bowie fans, who criticise its sluggish pacing and the vacant way it wanders from room to room, staring blankly at frames that don't have canvases in them. Even those of us who rather like it tend to make qualifying statements ("You've got to give it a chance... don't expect too much of it."). A misconception is created, for one thing, by the cover art – a mélange of gratuitous symbolism featuring snakes, barcodes and Bowie cradling the head of his dying *Earthling* persona. When you listen to it, you realise that *Hours...* is more of a worried frown than a sacrificial death. Its mortality is more abstract than the artwork makes it look.

Hours... is the last Bowie album to feature his loyal (and controversial) guitarist Reeves Gabrels, who is credited as co-producer and co-writer. Gabrels attacked his instrument with no concessions to Bowie's fanbase, and his critics were plentiful, especially when he was quoted as saying he wanted to "reinvent the guitar". Live, he could be tiresomely overpowering. I once stood next to a heckler in New York who shouted "Poor man's Adrian Belew!" every time Gabrels reached for the whammy bar. But Gabrels lovers and haters

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"*Hours...* fails not through pretension, overambition or trying to be down with the kids, but through time-honoured mediocre songwriting."
JOHNNY CIGARETTES, NME, OCTOBER 9, 1999

"Perhaps it is too late for the happily married, drug-free, 52-year-old wizard to make another truly great album. But for optimistic Bowie fans *Hours...* shows promise."
STEPHEN DALTON, UNCUT, NOVEMBER 1999

TRACKMARKS | Hours...

1. **Thursday's Child** ★★★★
2. **Something In The Air** ★★★
3. **Survive** ★★★
4. **If I'm Dreaming My Life** ★★
5. **Seven** ★★
6. **What's Really Happening?** ★★★★
7. **The Pretty Things Are Going To Hell** ★★★
8. **New Angels Of Promise** ★★★
9. **Brilliant Adventure** ★★★★
10. **The Dreamers** ★★★

RELEASED: October 4, 1999
LABEL: Virgin
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Reeves Gabrels
RECORDED AT: Seaview, Bermuda
PERSONNEL: David Bowie: (Vocals, keyboards, 12 string acoustic guitar, Roland 707 drum programming); Reeves Gabrels (electric guitar and acoustic 6 and 12 string guitars, drum loops and programming, Synth); Mark Plati (bass guitar, acoustic & electric 12 string guitar, synth and drum programming, Mellotron on "Survive"); Mike Levesque (drums); Sterling Campbell (drums on "Seven", "New Angels of Promise" and "The Dreamers"); Chris Haskett (rhythm guitar on "If I'm Dreaming My Life"); Everett Bradley (percussion on "Seven"); Holly Palmer (backing vocals on "Thursday's Child")
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 5; US 47

alike were surprised to note, on *Hours...*, how restrained he could be when he tried. On some songs he shows himself to be highly melodic – who knew? – and he plays a jaw-dropping solo ("Survive"), teetering on the edge of feedback, which appears to pay tribute to Mick Ronson's famous solo on "Moonage Daydream". Stepping away from techno? Putting a muzzle on Gabrels? Bowie was clearly hoping that *Hours...* would connect with people more than it did.

Pre-release speculation, in fact, centred on the teasing tagline that it was a return to *Hunky Dory*, a rechannelling of the Golden Dawn anima of "Quicksand" and the Tod Browning freakiness of "The Bewlay Brothers". For the most part, this proved a cruel hoax. The Bowie of *Hours...* is remote and unreadable, the emotional opposite of his huggable, hospitable *Hunky Dory* side. The mere fact that *Hours...* was recorded in a studio in Bermuda called Seaview is all the proof we need that Bowie parted company with his bedsitter antecedent many aeons ago. And yet, providing we use the comparison carefully, there *is* a bit of an early '70s flavour to *Hours...*, particularly in the second half when it livens up its act and notices some activity going on in the world outside. Even though Gabrels is back on his blasted whammy bar again, squealing and bagpiping, "What's Really Happening?" has a terrific glam-rock sizzle that Bowie obviously picked up on: he gives the song his 'displaced alien' voice, the one where "*face*" rhymes with "*ice*". The next track, "The Pretty Things Are Going To Hell", bursts in, rudely plonking its platform boots on the sofa, and *Hours...*, for four-and-a-half minutes, becomes a rock'n'roll record. But whereas the pretty things of 40 years ago read Nietzsche and drove their parents insane, the pretty things of today are instant gratification machines, insatiable for everything at once.

Hours... somehow contrived to disappoint the pretty things of both generations. The new lot weren't convinced by an old groover with Keanu Reeves hair. The old ones were frustrated by the sketchy imagery – a woman, a gallery, some flowers – and weren't in the mood to hypothesise whether it was science fiction, non-linear narrative, alternative reality or autobiography. The album's most fully realised track ("Brilliant Adventure") was a Sakamoto-esque instrumental lasting less than two minutes. Bowie was right in one sense. People don't have enough time any more.

RELEASE DATE 11 | JUNE | 2002

HEATHEN

Out of the ashes of the thwarted *Toys* project, Bowie and Visconti craft a sumptuous, mature classic. *By David Quantick*

ALBERT EINSTEIN'S THE *General Theory Of Relativity*. Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation Of Dreams*. And, as if for a spot of humour, *The Gay Science* by Friedrich Nietzsche. These are the three books that make up part of the booklet art for David Bowie's 2002 album, *Heathen*. Other images include works of art that someone has slashed and defaced, a crossed-out crucifix and the striking cover image of Bowie himself, immaculate in a suit, eyes glazed and milky. All of which suggest erasing of the past, removal of self, the obliteration of identity – and the dream state. There's never been a Bowie album more dreamy than *Heathen*. A lot of Bowie's work is detached in the emotional sense; *Heathen* seems to be more about how things fall apart and the centre cannot hold.

That said, it is at no point vague. *Heathen* is one of the great Bowie albums; it's his most mature, in the way the writers of classical music mature, from their groovy early work to the sheer mahogany imposingness of their later years. It sounds amazing – Tony Visconti producing some of his best work as well as Bowie's. And it sounds, unusually for any rock record made by somebody over 50, like a record made by somebody over 50. There are no songs about inappropriate sex with teenagers, no physically impossible rock boast anthems – just a brilliant cover of a rude Pixies song ("Cactus"). And *Heathen*'s best tracks – the imposing opener "Sunday", the wistful "Slip Away", the slowed-down "Heroes"-ish Juggernaut that is "Slow Burn" – glide like galleons. It's a record characterised with the still confidence of a man who knows his best work isn't behind him, it's here and now.

It wasn't always going to be that way. After the slight but lovely *Hours*... three years previously, Bowie planned to go to Virgin Records with an album of remakes of some of his own songs, perhaps to renew some copyrights, possibly out of nostalgia. Some of those songs were pre-fame Decca-period oldies like "Can't Help Thinking About Me" and "Baby Loves That Way", but some were unheard, unrecorded new compositions. The album was to be called *Toy* – a knowing, but nonetheless accurate title for what sounded like a bundle of fun. But *Toy* – and that hoped-for Virgin deal – never happened. Instead, some of *Toy*'s songs came out as b-sides – I implore you to track down the beautiful remake of 1970's "Conversation Piece" – while two of the new songs, "Uncle Floyd" (renamed "Slip Away") and "Afraid", were reworked for a new album on Columbia, which became *Heathen*.

As an album, *Heathen* ought not to work. It's composed of three elements – songs from *Toy*, cover versions, and new songs. The cover versions – "Cactus" (from 1988's *Surfer Rosa*), Neil Young's "I've Been Waiting For You" (from Young's first solo album) and the Legendary Stardust Cowboy's "I Took A Trip On A Gemini Spaceship" (the Ziggy inspiration's second single, from 1968) – seem to have been chosen purely because Bowie likes them, but in arrangement and tone they fit right in. And "Slip Away" and "Afraid", far from being vestigial leftovers from an aborted project, are all but centrepieces to *Heathen*. This should be all the more remarkable in the case of "Slip Away", which is essentially a nostalgic lament concerning the fate of the host and his puppet sidekick Oogie from the eccentric US cable television programme *The Uncle Floyd Show*, which went off air in 1998, but the song's air of loss and affection is entirely appropriate here. Likewise, "Afraid" is that rarest of things, a melancholic and vulnerable uptempo rocker.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

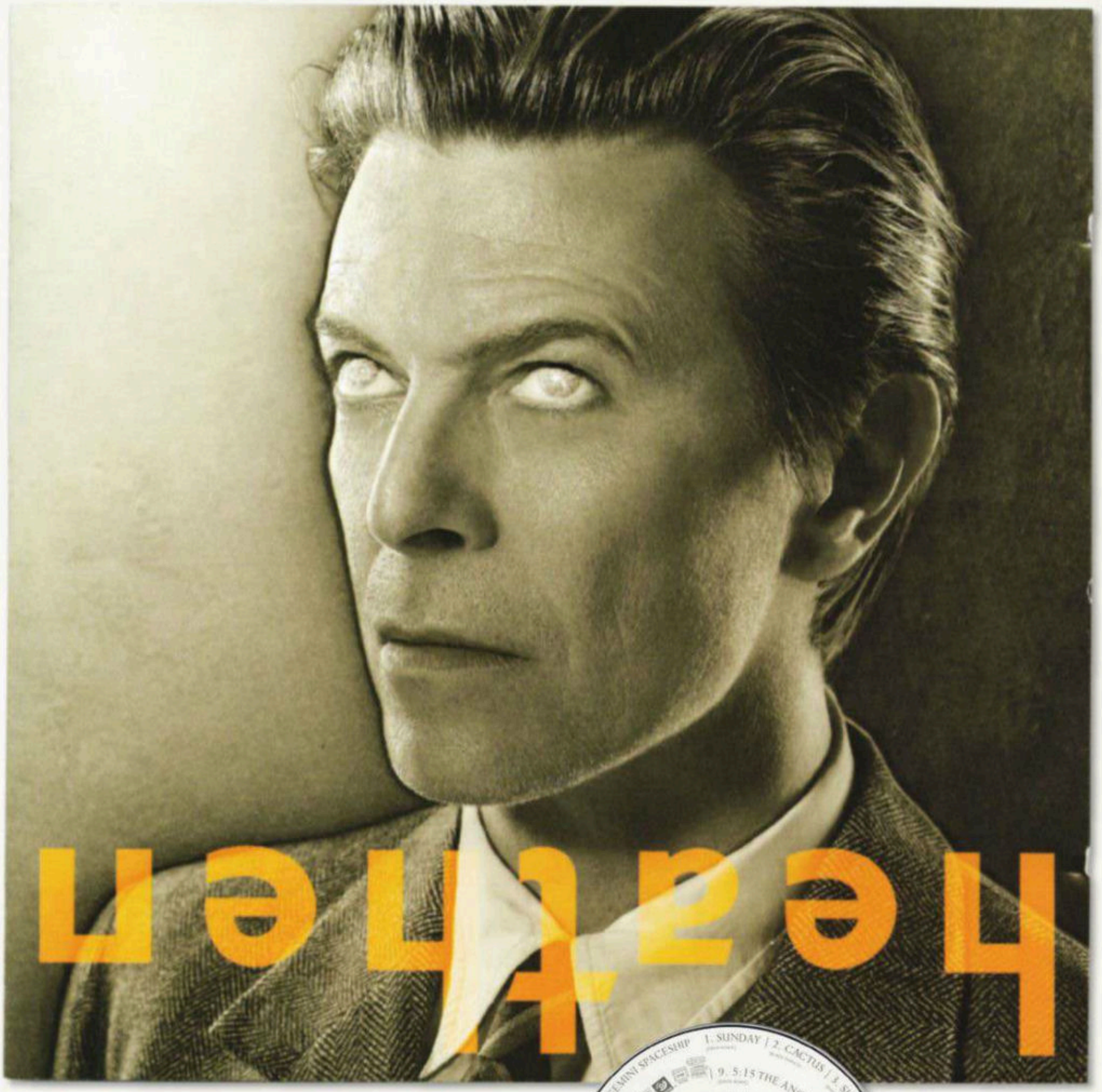
"Finally binning the zeitgeist-mounting personas, our original friend electric embarks on an anniversary waltz through the velvet-lined vaults of his past."
SARAH DEMPSTER, NME, JUNE 11, 2002

"None of the 12 tracks displays anything memorable in the way of melody or chorus, their phrasing short-breathed and tired, their sequences energyless."
IAN MACDONALD, UNCUT, JULY 2002

TRACKMARKS | Heathen

1. **Sunday** ★★★★★
2. **Cactus** ★★★★
3. **Slip Away** ★★★★★
4. **Slow Burn** ★★★★★
5. **Afraid** ★★★★
6. **I've Been Waiting For You** ★★★
7. **I Would Be Your Slave** ★★★
8. **I Took A Trip On A Gemini Spaceship** ★★★
9. **5:15 The Angels Have Gone** ★★★★★
10. **Everyone Says 'Hi'** ★★★★★
11. **A Better Future** ★★★★
12. **Heathen (The Rays)** ★★★★★

RELEASED: June 11, 2002
LABEL: ISO/Columbia
PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Tony Visconti, Brian Rawling, Gary Miller, Mark Plati
RECORDED AT: Allaire Studios, Shokan, The Looking Glass Studios, NYC
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, keyboards, guitars, sax, Stylophone, bk vocals, drums); Tony Visconti (bass, guitars, recorders, arrangements, bk vocals); Matt Chamberlain (drums, percussion); David Torn (guitars, Omnichord); Pete Townshend (guitar, "Slow Burn"), Dave Grohl (guitar, "I've Been Waiting For You")
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 5; US 14



It's the new songs, though, which leave the listener jaw-dropped and thunderstruck. The opener "Sunday" is full of washes of sound, choral and orchestral, with Bowie's croon both detached and impassioned. There's a sense of Bowie as observer and participant, and while he's made a career of being the former, it's heartening to hear him being the latter.

Its companion track is its bookend, the album's final song "Heathen (The Rays)", which offers a simultaneous vision of optimism and realism. *"All things must pass,"* sings George Harrison fan Bowie over the biggest wedge of synth since Side Two of *"Heroes"*. Then there's "Slow Burn", direct descendant of both "Heroes" and *Scary Monsters'* "Teenage Wasteland", and the plaintive "5:15 (The Angels Have Gone)", inspired, Bowie claimed, by the same drunken night of debauch with Pete Townshend that also gave birth to "Who Are You".

It's not all epic, mind. There's the lovely "A Better Future", whose tune is almost nursery rhyme and whose vocal is delivered by Bowie in his best "When I'm Five" naïve lad voice. *"I demand a better future Or I might just start wanting you"*, he chirps over the album's second jauntiest backing. The album's most jaunty backing occurs on the previous track, the utterly wonderful "Everyone Says 'Hi'", a song so preposterously charming that Bowie all but cracked up when performing it on *Top Of The Pops* in September 2002 – one of four tracks he'd pre-recorded in New York for a *TOTP 2* special. An almost cute song about a loved one (probably a teenage child) going away, "Everyone Says 'Hi'" is almost certainly the sequel to "Kooks", *Hunky Dory*'s celebration of Duncan "Zowie Bowie" Jones' birth. (*"I'd love to get a letter/Like to know what's what/ Hope the weather's good and it's not too hot…"* he implores, with paternal concern). "Everyone Says 'Hi'" also contains a musical quote from *Absolute Beginners* and the best fade-out ad lib about a "*big fat dog*" in rock history. And it was a single! And it made the Top 20!

Heathen's scope is masterful. In sound it recalls the weight, and sense of dignity, of *Scary Monsters* (Pete Townshend plays on both records), but at the album's heart seems to be a reflection on the passage of time and how we all got here.

RELEASE DATE 16 | SEPTEMBER | 2003

REALITY

Invigorated by New York, heartily in love, yet strikingly aware of his own mortality... Bowie comes to terms with Reality. *By Graeme Thomson*

SHORTLY BEFORE ENTERING Looking Glass Studios in Lower Manhattan in October 2002, David Bowie embarked on the New York City Marathon Tour. Marking the end of the *Heathen* tour, over 10 nights Bowie performed five intimate shows in five venues located in each of New York's five boroughs.

By the end of the final show at Manhattan's Beacon Theatre he was fired up, itching to return to the studio to harness the power of his live band. "We got off so much on being kind of a club band," Bowie later said. "It brought it home to me that that's the kind of album I should make. It really should reflect where I am now and how I live, the people I know and make music with."

Reality is, mostly, a vibrantly successful realisation of these aims. Largely sidestepping the weight, portent and supreme artfulness of *Heathen*, it's simply a bunch of excellent songs liberally sprinkled with Bowie's recurring late-period theme: mortality and how to live with it. In this scattershot portrait of a man in his mid-fifties, a little lost, a lot in love, above all demonstrably alive, the borrowed exhortation to "*face the music and dance*" heard in "New Killer Star" seems particularly apt.

Recorded quickly in a studio on the ninth floor of a NoHo office block, *Reality* is an urban album, rooted in the sights and sounds of Bowie's adopted home city and crackling with its energy. References to the Hudson, to Riverside, to Battery Park, all in the immediate vicinity of his Manhattan home, make it very obviously a New York record, with all the swagger, confidence, humour and jittery self-doubt which that implies.

It's one of Bowie's most straightforwardly enjoyable albums, an unforced mix of his past, present and future incarnations which sounds, perhaps surprisingly, effortlessly contemporary. "Never Get Old", a supple thing which evolves from a minimal, crab-like funk riff to full-blown anthemic tattoo, is smeared with references, both musical and lyrical, to Bowie's previous work, yet comes up smelling fresh as paint. An unconditional love song shot through with existential dread, its defiant will to live and humorous self-awareness captures the album's defining atmosphere of panicky positivity: "*I think about this and I think about personal history/Better take care/I breathe so deep when the movie gets real/When the star turns round...*"

Musically, the default setting is that driving, oddly euphoric and apparently ageless mix of skew-whiff guitars, textural synths and robust melody which Bowie patented on the run of records from *"Heroes"* to *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*. The crunchy, blocky guitars of "New Killer Star" (a pun so clunky it's actually rather fun) comes off like a better-adjusted "Boys Keep Swinging". "Looking For Water" is a thrilling slice of urban dread, twisting back and forth between two chords as it descends into the hellish heart of the city seeking relief.

The empathetic "She'll Drive The Big Car", too, offers an embarrassment of riches: opening with a burst of playful harmonica which recalls "A New Career In A New Town", it later undertakes one of Bowie's trademark leaps from edgy verse to uplifting chorus and is, from top to bottom, utterly glorious. As is the pleasingly absurdist "Fall Dog Bombs The Moon", both crisply attitudinal – "*I'm Goddamn rich! An exploding man!*" – and supremely melodic.

The pair of covers, a regular feature of most Bowie albums since the '80s, are more hit-and-miss. The version of George Harrison's "Try Some, Buy Some" – first recorded in 1971 by

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Lyrically mournful; musically euphoric... It's a very, very good sexy-angst album. For real."
CHRIS ROBERTS, UNCUT, OCTOBER, 2003

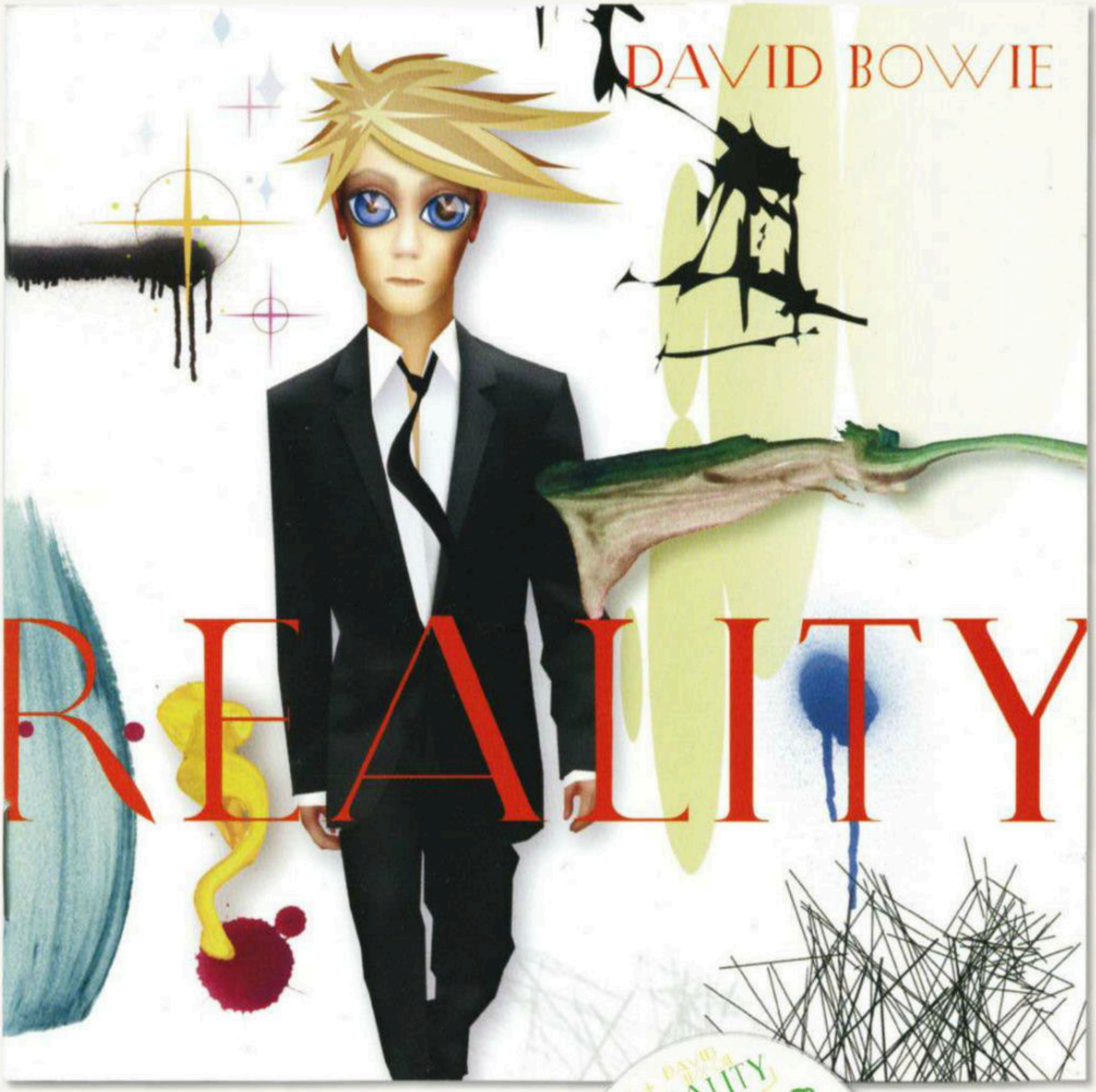
"'New Killer Star' carries all the fullness of past *"Heroes"*-era glories but 'Bring Me The Disco King' is a true thing of beauty – dark NY jazz, delivered with the confidence of a man who knows he can do exactly what he wants."
TIM WILD, NME, SEPTEMBER 6, 2003

TRACKMARKS | Reality

1. **New Killer Star** ★★★★
2. **Pablo Picasso** ★★★★
3. **Never Get Old** ★★★★
4. **The Loneliest Guy** ★★
5. **Looking For Water** ★★★★
6. **She'll Drive The Big Car** ★★★★★
7. **Days** ★★★
8. **Fall Dog Bombs The Moon** ★★★★
9. **Try Some, Buy Some** ★★★
10. **Reality** ★★★
11. **Bring Me The Disco King** ★★★★★

RELEASED: September 16, 2003
LABEL: ISO/Columbia

PRODUCED BY: David Bowie, Tony Visconti
RECORDED AT: The Looking Glass Studios, New York City
PERSONNEL: David Bowie (vocals, guitar, keyboards, percussion, saxophone, Stylophone, synthesiser); Sterling Campbell (drums); Gerry Leonard (guitar); Earl Slick (guitar); Mark Plati (bass, guitar); Mike Garson (piano); David Torn (guitar); Gail Ann Dorsey (backing vocals); Catherine Russell (backing vocals)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 3; US 29



Ronnie Spector – is soft and lumpy, scratching a sentimental itch to little material effect. Much better is the careening take on Jonathan Richman's "Pablo Picasso", which succeeds in being simultaneously abrasive, angular and laugh-out-loud funny. Bowie is clearly having a ball here, spitting out *"asshole"* and bawling tantrum-y *"waahs"* to his heart's content.

Elsewhere, *Reality* occasionally betrays the fact that it was written and recorded relatively quickly. Glacial ballad "The Loneliest Guy" is so morose you wonder if it's supposed to be a joke. Morbidly playing his apparently miserable past against the happiness of his present, Bowie sounds vogueishly alienated – *"pictures on my hard drive"* – but ultimately rather too studied to be genuinely moving. "Days" is a lightweight strum, more twee than touching and musically and lyrically routine (*"All the days of my life/All the days I owe you…"*) while the screeching title track has a superb vocal but otherwise is a little too reminiscent of Tin Machine's over-egged excesses. The steroidal histrionics of Earl Slick's guitar and the thud of Sterling Campbell's drums pummel another of Bowie's cleverly self-referential tangles with impending extinction: *"Now 'My Death' is more than just a sad song."*

If "Reality" is all punchy bravado in the face of oblivion, the closing "Bring Me The Disco King" is several fathoms deeper. A song Bowie had been trying to nail for the past decade, it's a long, serpentine exhumation of past decadence, told via a skeletal, jazz-inflected soundtrack lit up by Mike Garson's jaggedly avant-garde piano work and Bowie's haunted croon. If *Reality* proves to be Bowie's swan song, "Bring Me The Disco King" makes a powerfully appropriate curtain closer. While gazing unflinchingly at his past which involved *"killing time in the '70s"* with *"those who slept like corpses"*, Bowie also finds time to contemplate what comes next: *"Soon there will be nothing left of me… close me in the dark, let me disappear"*.

Yet *Reality* is neither melancholy nor backward-looking. An album which steals its energy from the vibrant flux of the times in which it's being made, it is, even in 2003, already disinclined to look "way back" to the Millennium. It's the sound of pop's greatest modernist, still pushing forward.

LIVE ALBUMS

The drama, strangeness and charm of David Bowie's official live albums. *By David Quantick*

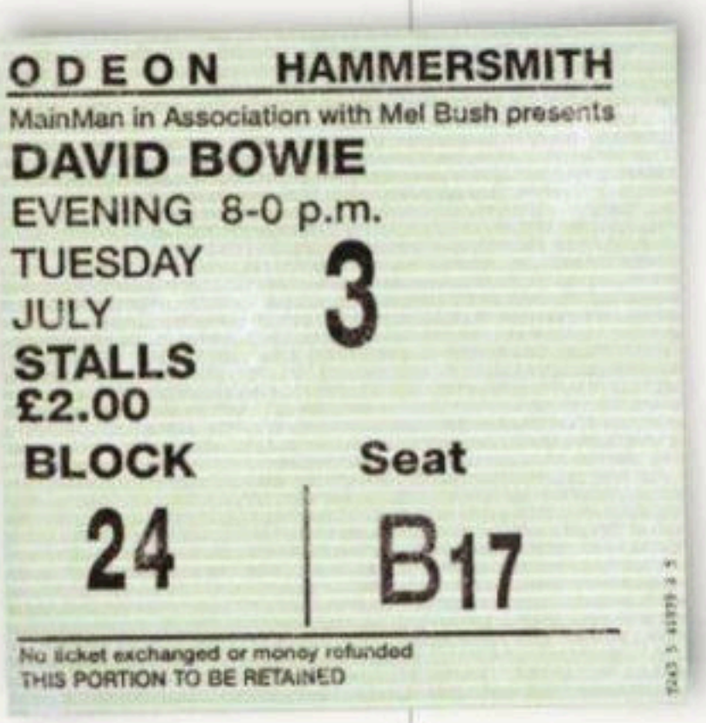
YOU CAN HEAR him getting happier. That's one of the joys of David Bowie's live career. From the nervous, eager-to-please art hippy of the late 1960s, to the fame-hungry creation of the Ziggy era, via the cold creature of the 1970s, and into the warmth and even laughter of his most recent work, Bowie's live career reflects the changes of his own life as much as that of, say, Dylan or Neil Young.

David Bowie, as befits anyone with such a long career, has made many live recordings which are, equally befitting that long career, many and variable. Some of them are famous, some of them were illegal and some of them were famous for being illegal. But these days you don't have to go out and risk prosecution – as people did in the 1970s with the BPI-approved bootleg honey trap *The Wembley Wizard Touches The Dial* – because there's plenty of them legally available. *Station To Station* now comes with its own live album, the excellent *Nassau '76* former bootleg, for fans of Bowie's '90s work there's the fanclub-only *Liveandwell.com* set, and you can even download a "Serious Moonlight Tour Live EP" (it's not bad). Not everything is official, sadly, but that's what YouTube is for. Try a short burst – Bowie's beautiful solo rendition of Simon & Garfunkel's "America" from the 9/11 Benefit Concert is very much worth having – or something more epic, like the criminally unreleased 50th Birthday concert at Madison Square Garden, where Bowie is joined by Sonic Youth, Lou Reed, Robert Smith, Dave Grohl and many others.

Here now, and all excellent in their own, often peculiar ways, are David Bowie's official live recordings, listed by year of recording:

LIVE SANTA MONICA '72 (1972) ★★★★★

"Playing to you courtesy of a piece of palm tree that I ate." David Buckley brilliantly claimed that owning this record in its bootleg form was "the test of a proper Bowie fan", and it's not hard to see why. *Santa Monica* isn't just one of the great live bootlegs, it's one of the great Bowie albums. Recorded at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium for an FM radio broadcast – giving it both excellent stereo reproduction and an overdub free roughness – Santa Monica is the best Bowie live record, featuring material from *Ziggy, Hunky Dory* and *The Man Who Sold The World*, plus a hilarious "Space Oddity" ("*unnnnnhhhhh – id dah, doo bah dah!*") and a very early, awesomely crunchy "The Jean Genie". There's also an excellent "I'm Waiting For The Man" and a brilliant "My Death". With the Spiders at their peak, plus Bowie's determination to become a star (and his bizarre between-song announcements), it's an essential purchase – and now, a legal one, following a classy recent reissue.



ZIGGY STARDUST: THE MOTION PICTURE 1973 ★★★

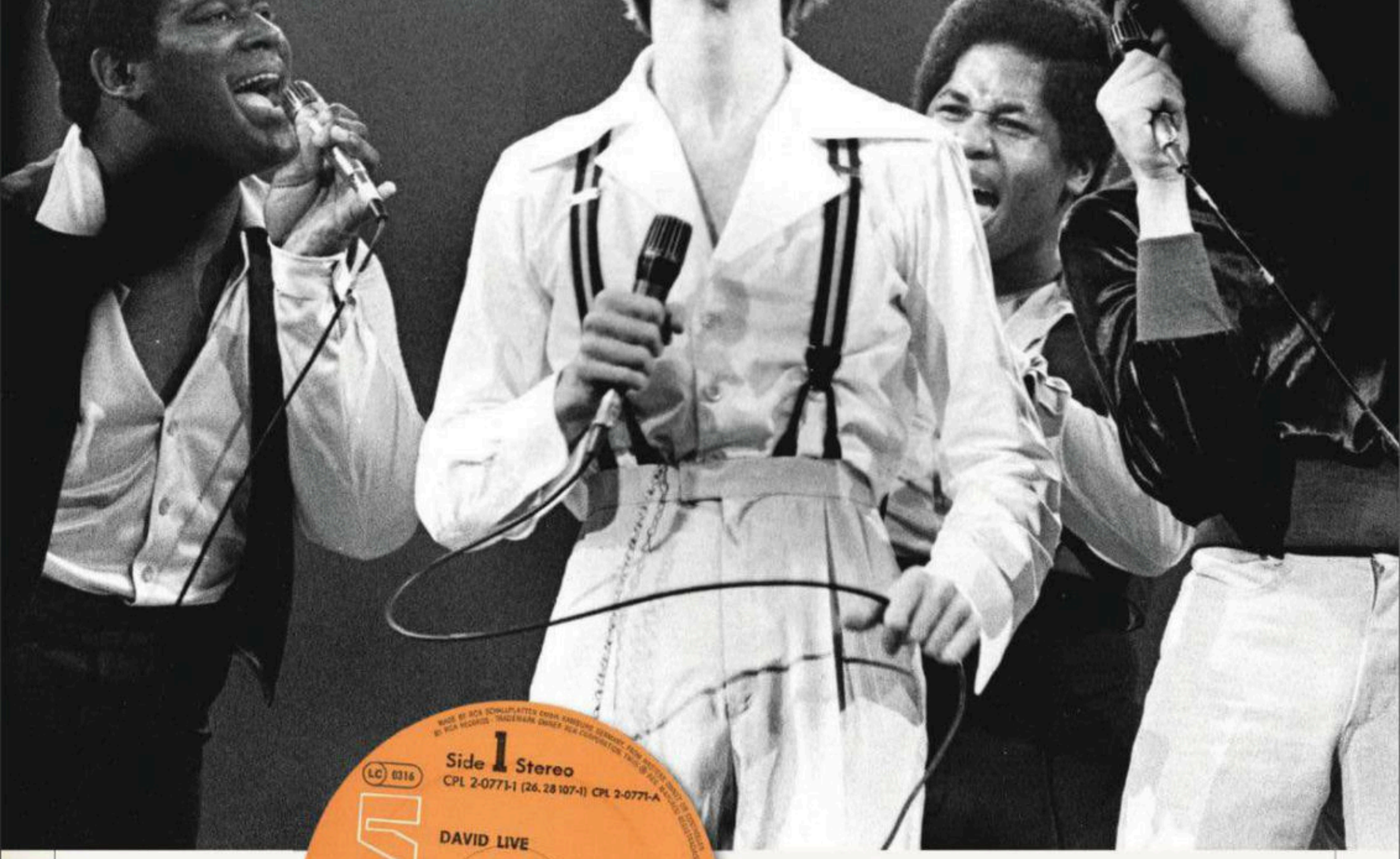
"Not only is it the last show of the tour, but it's the last show that we'll ever do..." He meant the BAND! Not him! One of the reasons for Santa Monica's popularity, apart from its excellence, was the sheer paucity of live Bowie recordings in the 1970s. This would have been an obvious choice, being the soundtrack to the DA Pennebaker documentary of the last ever Ziggy concert. But not only was it the last show they ever did, it also didn't come until 1983, by which time Ziggy was a figure of largely historical interest, Bowie had turned into a scrambled egghead pop star, and the movie became a document of a) just how often Ringo Starr turned up in people's dressing rooms and b) how much red there could be on one stage.

As an album in its own right, this Ziggy sounded awful on release, echoey and distant, as if recorded from the toilets. But a clean-up by Visconti (including some oddly well-mixed backing vocals – almost "as new"!) gives the album a fuller, better sound. With the bizarre medley of "Wild-Eyed Boy From Freecloud" and "All The Young Dudes", a great "White Light/White Heat" (but not sadly, the appearance of Jeff Beck on a CONTINUES OVER»

CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

The "farewell" gig, July 3, 1973 – as documented on *Ziggy Stardust: The Motion Picture*

David, live – with Luther Vandross (left) and Warren Peace (right), November 1974



medley of "The Jean Genie" and "Love Me Do") and the fantastically melodramatic finale ("No! Nooo!!!! NO!"), *Ziggy Stardust: The Motion Picture* is a great document and a decent live album.

DAVID LIVE (1974)

★★★★

"We're gonna play some extras tonight. Some silly ones."

Bowie said of this album's cover, "My God, it looks like I've just stepped out of the grave." Of its contents, he added, "That record should have been called 'David Bowie Is Alive And Well and Living Only In Theory'." Recorded not in the best of circumstances – Bowie sounds like he's eating cocaine from the barrel on most of the songs, while his band are still sulking from a recent backstage pay dispute – *David Live* has aged surprisingly well. Despite a cavernous sound that only adds to the listener's sense of dissociation, and the fact that many of the songs have been rearranged to the point of near-collapse, this works like all live albums should do – it's more than a live document of the artist's greatest hits, and it works as a record in its own right. These days it's easy to buy a CD of a live concert that sounds like nothing more than a studio recording with cheering on it; *David Live* could only be a live album.

Enhanced since its latest reissue with extra tracks (including some unreleased numbers written for *Young Americans*) and with the full concert order restored, *David Live* is an often grainy listening experience which, even with its overdubs, sounds as honestly close to the spirit of mid-'70s Bowie as possible. Mostly bought at the time for its curious choice of soul cover (that Philly classic "Knock On Wood") and the first inclusion of a Bowie version of "All The Young Dudes", *David Live* isn't always comfortable listening, but the best of Bowie never is.

STAGE (1978)

★★★

"Haaaaaah!"

Having been criticised for releasing a live album which sounded rough and was full of radical rearrangements of old songs, Bowie must have been a bit miffed when his next official live release was criticised for being full of sonically perfect recreations of old songs. *Stage* was also vexatious on release for its annoying trick of fading down the audience at the end of each track, presumably to save DJs the effort. As a result it sounded even less atmospheric

JOE STEVENS: GETTY IMAGES

(something not helped by the complete and utter lack of any onstage dialogue). With the gaps removed and the original running order restored, *Stage* now sounds a lot better – and the audience's delirium at hearing the Ziggy songs for the first time in years is wonderful. But it's hard to disagree with what Charles Shaar Murray said at the time – which is, essentially, that the only song which sounded at all different was the elongated "Breaking Glass", which RCA thoughtfully released on an EP, making the whole album redundant.

OY VEY BABY (WITH TIN MACHINE) (1992)

★★★

"Latin America does not sound like this..."

Has there ever been a band more heavily criticised by its own lead singer? As a project designed to sandblast away his 1980s "art school Phil Collins" image, Tin Machine was very effective; as a listening experience, less so. Time has been fairly kind to the band's third album, their live collection and (so far) nearest equivalent to a compilation. Playing to Tin Machine's strengths as a fiery live act with an excellent frontman, *Oy Vey Baby* not only collected the band's best songs but also began with a fine cover of "If There Is Something" by former Bowie rivals Roxy Music. (Asked about it at the time, Bryan Ferry said rather sourly, "I don't know why he's done it. I wish he hadn't".)

The rest of the album (an ironic and slightly outraged reply to U2's *Achtung Baby*, a title Bowie found slightly dubious) rocks more than almost anything else in Bowie's catalogue, especially on the epic "Heaven's In Here". Although it didn't sell well enough to justify the next live release, an aborted project allegedly called 'Use Your Wallet', *Oy Vey Baby* is very much worth a listen, and who knows? It may drive you to the more exotic shores of those two Tin Machine studio albums.

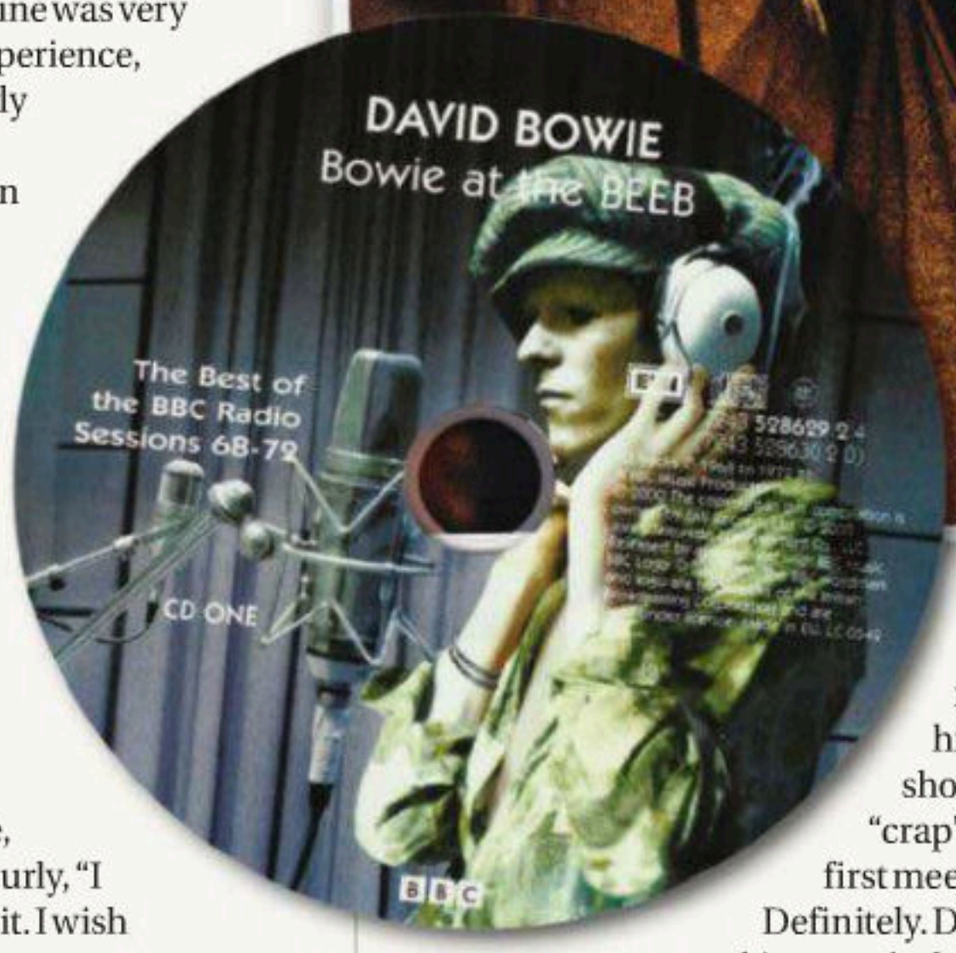
VH1 STORYTELLERS (1999)

★★★

"Iggy Pop and I were a couple of very naughty boys..."

Released in 2009 with accompanying DVD, this is a delightful snapshot of Bowie at his most cheerful, as he prefaces selections from his back catalogue (and newest album *Hours...*) with name-dropping stories of occasionally odd provenance. Was he really best friends with Steve Marriott before the Small Faces were formed? Quite possibly. Did Marc Bolan really tell him his shoes were "crap" at their first meeting? Definitely. Did a working man's club owner really point at a sink designated as a toilet and say, "If it's good enough for Shirley Bassey, it's good enough for you?" Who can say? A charming, if slight, album, but one worth it for the live version of Bowie's first great single (slated at the time for *Toy*), the brilliant, Who-esque "Can't Help Thinking About Me".

Bowie the storyteller: great songs, even greater between-song patter



BOWIE AT THE BEEB (2000)

★★★★

"Very nice indeed..."

This double CD beautifully documents Bowie's relationship with the land of his birth. It begins with early solo tracks recorded for Dave Lee Travis in 1968, moves into the Arts Lab era with one of the most cumbersome concerts ever recorded – John Peel is forced to introduce virtually every song with a different lineup, so varied are Bowie's friends and vocal collaborators – and then tears into a shedload of Ziggy-era rockers. And then nothing, as Bowie is discovered by America and then Berlin, restricting his appearances to visits to Victoria Station. Actually, this is slightly unfair, a fact documented by the limited edition third CD – available only with the first issue of this collection – which features a concert specially recorded in 2000 at Broadcasting House in front of a small audience, and is one of the most engaging live greatest hits ever recorded. Especially worth it for the live version of one of Bowie's most underrated singles, "Absolute Beginners".

A REALITY TOUR (2003)

★★★★

"You're not too old for a singalong, are you?"

Released in 2010, this is also David Bowie's last release to date, being a record – as its name gently hints – of the tour around his most recent album, *Reality*. And there's plenty of it, too. Gone are the days of shearing tracks off to fit four sides of vinyl: *Reality*'s tracks are taken from a DVD, and have been added to again. In fact, completists should get the iTunes version, which weighs in with an epic 35 tracks, from 1971's "The Man Who Sold The World" all the way up to "New Killer Star" and "Fall Dog Bombs The Moon". It's a good-natured collection, in line with all Bowie's concerts this century, and the new songs sound at least as good as the old classics. As a well-rounded way into all of Bowie's extraordinary career, it can't be beaten, indicating that – even if this is the final record of his career – Bowie has always been more about the present and the future than the past.

BOWIE THE ACTOR

Loving the thespian: the history of David Bowie, cracked actor, from *The Man Who Fell To Earth* to *Spongebob Squarepants*.

By Michael Bonner

MOST OF DAVID Bowie's more recent acting roles have required very little preparation. He has made entertaining cameos as himself in *Zoolander* and *The Office*; and provided voices for animated characters in *Spongebob's Atlantis Squarepantis* and *Luc Besson's Arthur And The Invisibles*.

In 2006, though, director Christopher Nolan cast Bowie as the pioneering electrical engineer Nikolai Tesla in his elegant Victorian thriller, **The Prestige**. It's hard not to draw parallels between Tesla, the reclusive genius, and Bowie himself these days, living out semi-retirement in his New York home – after all, he has often been powerfully connected to his acting roles, inhabiting his '70s stage personae with Actor's Studio dedication. As John Lennon dryly commented, "Meeting him… you don't know which one you're talking to."

Bowie's acting dates back to the earliest days of his career. In mid-1967, when "The Laughing Gnome" stalled his 'other' career for two years, he met choreographer and mime artist, Lindsay Kemp. Kemp gave Bowie his first stage role – as a clown, Cloud, in **Pierrot In Turquoise**, which first played in Oxford in December, 1967. It was filmed by Scottish Television and you can find it on YouTube, along with another early Bowie credit – as a mysterious, ghostly presence haunting a painter in 1967 short, **The Image**. Both of these are of-their-time oddities. But if Bowie's earliest forays into acting are emblematic of a fledgling artist trying to establish himself, he's a far more persuasive dramatic presence in the '70s.

Much of that rests with his big breakthrough role: playing alien visitor Thomas Jerome Newton in Nic Roeg's 1976 film, **The Man Who Fell To Earth**. Roeg cast Bowie after seeing him in Alan Yentob's 1974 American tour documentary, *Cracked Actor*. In *Cracked Actor*, the disconnected, skeletally thin Bowie looked fantastically otherworldly: all Roeg really required him to do, then, was be himself. *The Man Who Fell To Earth* ends with Newton reviled, humiliated and broken; a fate suffered by many of Bowie's characters.

It's hard, however, to see where 1978's **Just A Gigolo** fits into this period of Bowie's acting career. Newton and many of the parts that followed into the early '80s are all outsider figures: the Elephant Man, a vampire, and the goblin king. But for his friend David Hemmings, Bowie plays a Prussian officer in post-WWI Berlin who becomes a gigolo for wealthy widows. It's a curiously 'normal' (read: dull) part, sandwiched between Newton and his next role as John Merrick, **The Elephant Man**.

If Newton was basically Bowie as himself, playing Merrick on the American stage in late 1980 required physical transformation – allowing Bowie to dust down his mime skills learned from Lindsay Kemp. When Tim Rice asked Bowie, on an edition of BBC chat show *Friday Night, Saturday Morning*, what appealed to him about the role, Bowie answered, "I have a thing about freaks, isolationists and alienated people."

He's very good in **Baal**, an adaptation by *Scum* director Alan Clarke for the BBC, which aired in February 1982. Both Merrick and Baal require the actor to put aside vanity, which Bowie does, full of piss and vinegar as Brecht's murderous, itinerant poet. "Genius always suffers persecution," Baal is told early on in the play; as good a description as any for many of the characters we're talking about here.

He is persecuted further in 1983's **Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence**. Released while he was enjoying mainstream success with *Let's Dance*, Bowie plays Japanese PoW Major Jack Celliers, who becomes the obsession of camp commander Captain Yonoi (Ryuichi Sakamoto). Though there are musings on honour, codes of conduct and east/west culture clashes, director Nagisa Oshima (*In The Realm Of The Senses*) lingers on the tensions between Celliers and Yonoi. They're a handsome pair, and Bowie – with his blond hair and deep tan – appears almost golden. It's a stretch when we see Bowie, then 36, playing the 10-year-old Celliers in flashback, but forgive that: he is excellent as the doomed,

Bowie with Michelle Pfeiffer in *Into The Night*

EYEVINE, KOBAL

...as Celliers in *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*

...as John in *The Hunger*

...and as Jareth The Goblin King in *Labyrinth*

defiant army major, way out of his freakish comfort zone.

Bowie is required only for his *Bowieness* in Tony Scott's **The Hunger** (1983), playing Catherine Deneuve's vampire lover. He's very funny as a terribly British hitman in John Landis' comedy **Into The Night** (1985), facing Carl Perkins in a knife-fight. He fares less well as smarmy ad exec Vendice Partners in Julien Temple's dreadful musical **Absolute Beginners** (1986). Bowie does get to dance on a giant typewriter, though.

And then there's Jim Henson's **Labyrinth** (1986). Bowie had contributed to children's projects before – he'd narrated a version of **Peter And The Wolf** (1978) and recorded an introduction to **The Snowman** (1982). But as Jareth, the Goblin King, he will always be remembered for a dreadful fright wig, some very tight trousers and singing with Goth Muppets. To the Bog Of Eternal Stench, indeed.

After *Labyrinth*, Bowie's acting career becomes bittier and less focused. He gives an intelligent reading of Pontius Pilate for Scorsese in **The Last Temptation Of Christ** (1988), playing him as a bureaucrat simply trying to keep the peace. Misfiring caper **The Linguini Incident** (1991) finds Bowie's English bartender plotting with disgruntled colleague Roseanna Arquette. There's a fun cameo as long-lost FBI agent Phillip Jeffries in **Lynch's Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me** (1992), making cryptic pronouncements in an outrageous Texan accent before disappearing, literally, into thin air. Surprisingly, he's less successful as Andy Warhol in Julian Schnabel's **Basquiat** (1996); his performance too close to caricature. He is miscast as a baddie in Spaghetti western **Gunslinger's Revenge** (1998) and as an ageing British gangster opposite Goldie in **Everybody Loves The Sunshine** (1999). His cameos in **Zoolander** (2001), judging a 'walk off' between rival models Ben Stiller and Luke Wilson, and serenading Ricky Gervais in a 2006 episode of *The Office* ("*Pathetic little fat man/no-one's bloody laughing*") are diverting *amuse-bouches*. These days, you're likely to get your big Bowie fix from his son, Duncan, promising director of two excellent sci-fi movies, *Moon* (2009) and *Source Code* (2011).

But it's Christopher Nolan's brilliant casting of Bowie in *The Prestige* that reminds you – goblins, cowboys and Prussian officers aside – how compelling a dramatic presence he can be. Bowie enjoys a spectacular entrance as Tesla, walking into shot through fearsome arcs of electromagnetic current. This is Tesla the erratic genius, pioneering in isolation on his scientific projects: time travel, anti-gravity machines, teleportation devices. Nikolai Tesla. The man who harnessed electricity. Who else are you going to get to play him?

THE MISCELLANY

Compilations, collaborations, collectables and more

SOUND AND REVISIONS!

The best of the Bowie compilations

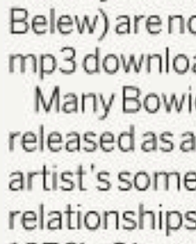
Over the past 40 years, there have been nearly 50 official compilations of David Bowie's music, but not one – even in this age of boxsets and deluxe packaging – that offers a comprehensive career overview. There's a great deal of repetition (how many versions of "The Laughing Gnome" does one man need?) while large periods of his career remain unrepresented: no singles collection stretches past 1987's *Never Let Me Down*, and his last Top 20 hit ("Arnold Layne", in collaboration with David Gilmour) and other single one-offs (like "Pretty Pink Rose", with Adrian Belew) are now best found as mp3 downloads.

Many Bowie compilations were released as a direct result of the artist's sometimes fractious relationships with his labels (sales of 1976's *Changesonebowie* would offset RCA's misgivings about Bowie's new musical direction) or were simply rebrandings of his earlier, pre-fame material (step forward, Decca). To get a really satisfying Bowie comp, you're probably best off making your own selection – as Bowie himself did in 2008 for *The Mail On Sunday*. Here's our rundown of the most notable Bowie collections.

THE WORLD OF DAVID BOWIE

DECCA, MARCH 1970

CHART POSITION: N/A



Having dropped Bowie from the label following 1967's *David Bowie*, Decca took the opportunity to cash in on "Space Oddity"'s success with this collection of cuts from the album, expanded with four previously unreleased tracks (marked with an asterisk). *The World...* was later reissued, and was the first of many Decca compilations based on similar material, including *Another Face* in 1981, and *A Second Face* and *Prime Cuts*, both 1983.

TRACKLISTING

Side One: Uncle Arthur/Love You Till Tuesday/There Is A Happy Land/Little Bombardier/Sell Me A Coat/Silly Boy Blue/The London Boys*

Side Two: Karma Man*/Rubber Band/Let Me Sleep Beside You*/Come And Buy My Toys/She's Got Medals/In The Heat Of The Morning*/When I Live My Dream

IMAGES 1966-1967

DERAM, FEBRUARY 1973

CHART POSITION: US 144

Another example of Decca responding to Bowie's success, in this case his growing popularity in the US. It combined material from *David Bowie* with singles and b-sides recorded for the label, including "The Laughing Gnome", re-released in September of that year.

CHANGESONEBOWIE

RCA, MAY 1976

CHART POSITION: UK 2; US 10

This, the first compilation of Bowie's RCA output, proved a huge success, going platinum in the US by 1981. It is notable for containing the first album appearance of "John, I'm Only Dancing" – on the first 1000 copies of the UK pressing, in a rare 'sax version'. If you've got one, it's a celebrated Bowie collectable!

THE BEST OF BOWIE

K-TEL, DECEMBER 1980

CHART POSITION: UK 3

With cover art adapted from the sleeve of the "Fashion" single, this compilation includes unique edits of "Life On Mars?" and "Diamond Dogs" – apparently trimmed to fit all 16 tracks onto a single LP – and rare edits of "Fame" and "Golden Years".

CHANGESTWOBOWIE

RCA, NOVEMBER 1981

CHART POSITION:

UK 24; US 68

Less successful than its predecessor, *Changestwo* was another similarly themed rag-bag of notable singles and choice album cuts. Like all of Bowie's RCA back catalogue, it was released on CD in '85 but withdrawn within a year due to conflict with the label.

BOWIE RARE

RCA, JANUARY 1983

CHART POSITION: UK 34; US 47

A collection of rarities from 1969-80, including "lost" single "Holy Holy", "Ragazzo Solo, Ragazza Sola", Bowie's Italian rewrite of "Space Oddity", and "Helden" – the German version of "Heroes", alongside b-sides and covers of Chuck Berry and Jacques Brel songs. Bowie was unhappy with the release, which marked the end of his time at RCA.

LOVE YOU TILL TUESDAY

DERAM, MAY 1984

CHART POSITION: UK 53

Put together as a half-hour film during Bowie's time at Decca, this recording – the sole audio document of Bowie's time with mime troupe Feathers – is perhaps most notable for "Ching-a-ling", which features a melody reused on 1970's "Saviour Machine".

SOUND + VISION

RYKODISC, SEPTEMBER 1989

CHART POSITION: US 97

A three-CD, six-LP boxset with Grammy-winning art and packaging, this was a lavish teaser for Rykodisc's comprehensive CD reissues of Bowie's '69-80 material. There are also alternate takes of well-known tracks, including the US version of "Rebel Rebel".

CHANGESBOWIE

EMI, MARCH 1990

CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 32

A platinum-selling promotional vehicle for the Rykodisc remastering campaign, and the first set to collect Bowie's successful early 1980s singles for EMI. The first 13 tracks follow the *Changesone* tracklist exactly, bar "Fame", which was replaced with the 1990 remix.

EARLY ON (1964-1966)

RHINO, AUGUST 1991

CHART POSITION: N/A

A chronological collection of early releases from the formative years as Davie Jones became David Bowie, including his first six singles [*see panel, below right*] and five previously unreleased demos from '65.

TRACKLISTING

Liza Jane/Louie, Louie Go Home/I Pity the Fool/Take My Tip/That's Where My Heart Is/I Want My Baby Back/Bars Of The County Jail/You've Got A Habit Of Leaving/Baby Loves That Way/I'll Follow You/Glad I've Got Nobody/Can't Help Thinking About Me/And I Say to Myself/Do Anything You Say/Good Morning Girl/I Dig Everything/I'm Not Losing Sleep

THE SINGLES COLLECTION

EMI, NOVEMBER 1993

CHART POSITION: UK 9

Despite the name, this double-disc compilation includes in many cases the full-length album versions of tracks, rather than single edits, and in the case of "Ziggy Stardust" one track that wasn't released as a single until 1994.

RARESTONEBOWIE

GOLDEN YEARS, MAY 1995

CHART POSITION: N/A

Not a bootleg, but not strictly official, *Rarestonebowie* was issued by MainMan, Bowie's '70s management company, without his permission. All tracks bar "All The Young Dudes" are live, and a contemporary radio ad for *Pinups* is hidden in the pregap before the first track.

TRACKLISTING

All the Young Dudes/Queen Bitch/Sound and Vision/Time/Be My Wife/Footstompin/Ziggy Stardust/My Death/I Feel Free

BOWIE AT THE BEEB

EMI, SEPTEMBER 2000

CHART POSITION: N/A

REX

Bowie fronting The King Bees on BBC's *The Beat Room*, 1964

A collection of Bowie BBC performances, 1968-1972. "Looking For A Friend", recorded for John Peel in '71, was intended as an Arnold Corns single but never released, making this its only recorded performance. The first pressing accidentally included the same version of "Ziggy Stardust" twice.

TRACKLISTING

Disc One:

In The Heat Of The Morning/London Bye Ta Ta/Karma Man/Silly Boy Blue/Let Me Sleep Beside You/Janine/Amsterdam/God Knows I'm Good/The Width Of A Circle/Unwashed And Somewhat Slightly Dazed/Cygnet Committee/Memory Of A Free Festival/The Wild Eyed Boy From Freecloud/Bombers/Looking For A Friend/Almost Grown/Kooks/It Ain't Easy

Disc Two:

The Supermen/Eight Line Poem/Hang Onto Yourself/Ziggy Stardust/Queen Bitch/Waiting For The Man/Five Years/White Light/White Heat/Moonage Daydream/Hang Onto Yourself/Suffragette City/Ziggy Stardust/Starman/Space Oddity/Changes/Oh! You Pretty Things/Andy Warhol/Lady Stardust/Rock 'N' Roll Suicide

ALL SAINTS

EMI, JULY 2001

CHART POSITION: N/A

The original version of *All Saints* was a limited run of 150 copies put together as a Christmas present for Bowie's friends and family in 1993, collecting various instrumental tracks and Philip Glass' *Low Symphony* version of "Some Are". It quickly became a highly desirable collector's item, and EMI released their own version with a similar set of tracks.

TRACKLISTING

A New Career In Town/V-2 Schneider/Abdulmajid/Weeping Wall/All Saints/Art Decade/Crystal Japan/Brilliant Adventure/Sense Of Doubt/Moss Garden/Neuköln/The Mysteries/Ian Fish UK Heir/Subterraneans/Warszawa/Some Are

CLUB BOWIE

EMI, NOVEMBER 2003

CHART POSITION: N/A

A compilation of rare and unreleased remixes of various Bowie songs, by DJs including David Guetta and The Scumfrog. An early promo CDR included a Metrophonic remix of "Starman" that was dropped.

THE COLLECTION

EMI, MAY 2005

CHART POSITION: N/A

The concept comp! A chronological album-focused collection, which draws one non-single track from every album, with the exception of *Pinups*, released between 1969 and 1980.

THE PLATINUM COLLECTION

EMI, NOVEMBER 2005

CHART POSITION: UK 55

A collection of three albums released individually between 1997 and 2007 as *The Best Of David Bowie 1969/1974*, *1974/1979* and *1980/1987*. *1969/1974* was the best-selling (reaching No 13 in the UK charts) and has the most notable tracks: the sax version of "John, I'm Only Dancing"; the original 1970 "The Prettiest Star" with Marc Bolan on lead guitar and the 1973 studio version of "All The Young Dudes".

ISELECT

MAIL ON SUNDAY, JUNE 2008

EMI, OCTOBER 2008

CHART POSITION: N/A

A covermounted freebie for the June 29 edition of *The Mail On Sunday* (and reissued commercially by EMI in the US) with tracks chosen by Bowie himself. It features "Some Are", an otherwise unavailable bonus track from the deleted '91 reissue of *Low*.

THE PRE-DECCA SINGLES, 1964-1966

DAVIE JONES WITH THE KING BEES

LIZA JANE/LOUIE, LOUIE GO HOME

VOCALION POP, JUNE 1964

David's first-ever single was a version of the old standard "Li'l Liza Jane". Manager Leslie Conn was credited – allegedly to enhance royalties – as writer.

THE MANISH BOYS

I PITY THE FOOL/TAKE MY TIP

PARLOPHONE, MARCH 1965

Originally recorded by Bobby Bland in 1961, this cover featured session guitar by Jimmy Page, the year before he joined The Yardbirds, and was produced by Shel Talmy. The b-side was the first Bowie-penned song released.

DAVY JONES AND THE LOWER THIRD

YOU'VE GOT A HABIT OF LEAVING/BABY LOVES THAT WAY

PARLOPHONE, AUGUST 1965

Joining Jones (on the last release before changing his name to avoid confusion with The Monkees' Davy Jones) are The Lower Third: Dennis Taylor (guitar), Graham Rivens (bass), Phil Lancaster (drums)

DAVID BOWIE WITH THE LOWER THIRD

CAN'T HELP THINKING ABOUT ME/AND I SAY TO MYSELF

PYE, JANUARY 1966

Now on Pye – and produced by Tony Hatch – this marked the very first appearance of the Bowie brand. It was also his first US release.

DAVID BOWIE

DO ANYTHING YOU SAY/GOOD MORNING GIRL

PYE, APRIL 1966

With backing band The Buzz's name omitted, this single was the first credited to David Bowie alone and his first solo writing credit. **CONTINUES OVER»**

ASHES TO CASH-INS

Bowie records and memorabilia

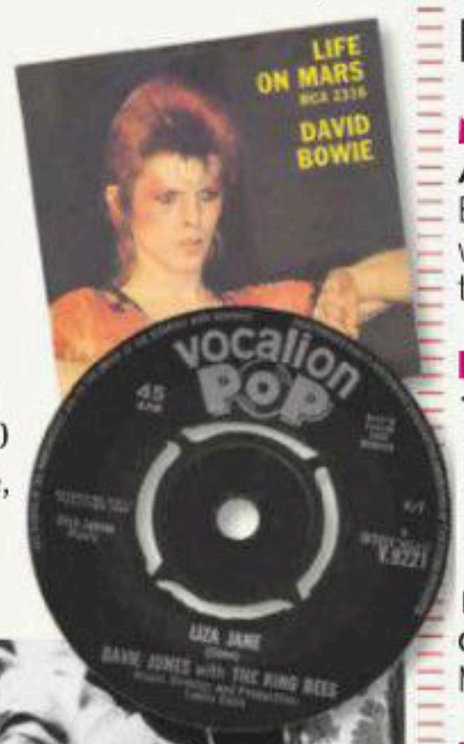
DAVID BOWIE'S CAREER trajectory makes him the textbook collectable artist. There are several years of under-the-radar obscurities, followed by a big-selling breakthrough, and sustained, massive mainstream appeal. He was one of the first rock stars to enjoy a targeted reissue campaign – those early LPs were re-released and charted in the wake of *Ziggy Stardust* in 1972, making instant collectables of his pre-fame output. Every generation has (re)discovered Bowie, and each wants a piece of his past.

"Bowie is one of our top 10 most collectable artists, and there's a hell of a lot out there to keep collectors' attention," confirms Julian Thomas, buyer for memorabilia specialist 991.com. Some of the most famous collectables in rock are to be found in Bowie's back catalogue – the 'dress cover' of *The Man Who Sold The World* (now worth £500), the promo demo of excerpts "From The New Album *Low*" (£800), the original UK picture sleeve of "Space Oddity" (there are only two or three copies, you pick a price). The early singles are also hugely sought-after, especially the Vocalion label "Liza Jane" – worth around £1200 – and the Manish Boys "I Pity The Fool", which is usually valued around £600. "Foreign picture sleeves of 'Space Oddity' can fetch thousands," adds Thomas. Ditto the semi-official purple vinyl *Scary Monsters*. A copy sold in 2007 for £4220.

Like all major artists of the 1970s and 1980s, bog-standard issues of his albums and singles are less valuable. Condition, as always, is the key. A much-loved *Aladdin Sane*, even with the desirable 'Fan Club' insert, is probably worth a tenner, maximum, though mint versions sell for more. Your first issue of *"Heroes"* is probably worth more to you than a dealer, and '80s vinyl albums are probably best recycled into your own Bowie-style art installation, perhaps titled 'Unloved Record Collection'. Promos aside, Bowie's post '72 singles are nice to have but not hugely valuable. Look out for picture sleeves, though, particularly for "Life On Mars" and "Starman" – they are worth around £70 and £110, respectively.

There are some interesting quirks for the Bowie collector. When Bowie left RCA, the label promptly reissued his albums on budget vinyl (the RCA International releases) and, a couple of years later on CD. RCA had jumped the gun, slightly – few people owned CD players in 1984 – and the discs were withdrawn. They have no bonus tracks, weren't remastered and are ascetic on artwork, but these days, one will set you back £40.

But for the really hardcore Bowie collector, it's what Thomas calls the "cool one-offs" that really excite: personal items, stage props, costumes and the like. Provenance, the ability to prove authenticity, is key, of course. 991.com sold a "Life Mask" from *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, a cast of Bowie's face in white plaster taken on set, and one of very few originals to come to market in 35 years. It made £995. Likewise, two 7" x 5" Post Office telegrams sent by Bowie, while in Malta, to one Angela Barnett of Foxgrove Rd, Beckenham – you'll know her as Angie – in late July 1969 caused quite a stir. One bears the legend "BLOODY HOT – BOWIE", and the other states: "SMALLTOWN TWO HOTELS LOVE BOWIE". Each made £500 in 2005, and prove that when it comes to Bowie, even apparently godawful small affairs can fetch big money indeed. ***Mark Bentley***



Beamed in from planet Bowie: Have you got what he's got?

Watch that man, Lulu! The Scots soul girl and DB, 1973

GIMME A HAND! YOU'RE WONDERFUL!

Bowie's collaborations and guest appearances

MOTT THE HOOPLE
ALL THE YOUNG DUDES CBS, SEP 1972
Bowie produced the album, and wrote – and plays saxophone on – the title track.

LOU REED
TRANSFORMER RCA, NOV 1972
Bowie co-produced the album and provides backing vocals.

IGGY & THE STOOGES
RAW POWER
COLUMBIA, MAY 1973
Mixed by Bowie.

DANA GILLESPIE
WEREN'T BORN A MAN RCA, AUG 1973
Bowie co-produced "Andy Warhol", "Backed A Loser" (both written by Bowie) and "Mother Don't Be Frightened".

LULU
THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD/ WATCH THAT MAN POLYDOR, JAN 1974
Bowie co-produced and wrote the single, as well as contributing guitar, saxophone and backing vocals.

MICK RONSON
SLAUGHTER ON 10TH AVENUE
RCA, FEBRUARY 1974
For his Spiders lieutenant, Bowie wrote "Growing Up And I'm Fine", co-wrote "Hey Ma Get Papa" and translated "Music Is Lethal" into English from Lucio Battisti's Italian original "Io Vorrei... Non Vorrei... Ma Se Vuoi...".

STEELEYE SPAN
NOW WE ARE SIX
CHRYSALIS, MARCH 1974
Bowie plays sax on "To Know Him Is To Love Him".

THE ROLLING STONES
IT'S ONLY ROCK 'N' ROLL...
ROLLING STONES, OCT 1974
Bowie provides (uncredited) backing vocals on title track.

IGGY POP
THE IDIOT RCA, MARCH 1977
Bowie produced, co-wrote all the tracks, plays keyboards, guitar and saxophone and provides backing vocals.

ALPHA, GETTY, LFI

BUT WHERE WERE THE SPIDERS?

Life after Bowie for Ronno and co

The story of one of rock's most famous backing bands does not end with their onstage firing in 1973; many of the Spiders pursued solo careers, albeit with varying levels of success. Mick Ronson and Woody Woodmansey had already worked together without Bowie, releasing "4th Hour Of My Sleep" as Ronno, with Tony Visconti, in 1971. Ronno's solitary single was received with general indifference, but Ronson enjoyed mainstream solo success in '74, when *Slaughter On 10th Avenue* peaked at No 9 – 1975 follow-up *Play Don't Worry* did decent business, too, making No 29. In '76, Woodmansey, Mike Garson and Trevor Bolder joined with Dave Black to resurrect the Spiders name, but their self-titled album failed to blow many minds and they split once and for all soon afterwards. Bowie completists should also look out for the sole album from Woody Woodmansey's U-Boat, released in '77 on Bronze.

IGGY POP
LUST FOR LIFE
RCA, AUGUST 1977
Bowie produced and co-wrote all tracks except "Sixteen" and "The Passenger".

VARIOUS ARTISTS
JUST A GIGOLO SOUNDTRACK
JAMBO, FEBRUARY 1979
David co-wrote "Revolutionary Song" and provides backing vocals.

IGGY POP
SOLDIER ARISTA, FEBRUARY 1980
Bowie provides backing vocals on "Play It Safe" (co-written by Bowie) along with Simple Minds.

QUEEN
HOT SPACE
EMI, MAY 1982
Bowie sings on "Under Pressure".

IGGY POP
BLAH BLAH BLAH A&M, OCTOBER 1986
Bowie co-produced the album and co-wrote "Baby, It Can't Fall", "Shades", "Isolation", "Blah-Blah-Blah", "Hideaway", "Little Miss Emperor". Bowie's backing vocals were apparently removed from most tracks at the last minute.

TINA TURNER
TINA LIVE IN EUROPE
CAPITOL, MARCH 1988
David duets on "Tonight" and "Let's Dance", recorded live at the NEC.

ADRIAN BELEW
YOUNG LIONS ATLANTIC, MAY 1990
Bowie sings on "Pretty Pink Rose" (written by Bowie) and "Gunman", co-written with Belew.

MICK RONSON
HEAVEN AND HULL EPIC, MAY 1994
Bowie sings on "Like A Rolling Stone" and "All The Young Dudes (live)", plus backing vocals on "Colour Me".

REEVES GABRELS
THE SACRED SQUALL OF NOW
UPSTART, JANUARY 1995
Bowie sings on "You've Been Around" (a remake of the *Black Tie, White Noise* cut) and "The King Of Stamford Hill".

AVA CHERRY
PEOPLE FROM BAD HOMES
GRIFFIN, MAY 1995
Bowie produces, sings backing vocals on numerous tracks, lead vocals on "I Am Divine". Originally recorded in 1973.

GOLDIE
SATURNZRETURN UNI, JAN 1998
Bowie provides vocals on "Truth".

PLACEBO
"WITHOUT YOU I'M NOTHING"
VIRGIN, AUGUST 1999
Additional vocals.

REEVES GABRELS
ULYSSES (DELLA NOTTE)
E-MAGINE, SEPTEMBER 1999
Vocals on "Jewel".

RUSTIC OVERTONES
¡VIVA NUEVA! TOMMY BOY, JUNE 2001
Bowie sings on "Sector Z" and "Man Without A Mouth".

VARIOUS
TRAINING DAY SOUNDTRACK
PRIORITY, SEPTEMBER 2001
Bowie provides vocals to P Diddy's "American Dream".

LOU REED
THE RAVEN RCA, JANUARY 2003
Bowie sings on "Hop Frog".

EARL SLICK
ZIG ZAG SANCTUARY, DECEMBER 2003
Bowie sings on "Isn't It Evening (The Revolutionary)".

KRISTEEN YOUNG
BREASTICLES
ZONA, DECEMBER 2004
Bowie duets on "Saviour".

KASHMIR
NO BALANCE PALACE
SONY, OCTOBER 2005
Bowie duets with Kasper Eistrup on "The Cynic".

TV ON THE RADIO
RETURN TO COOKIE MOUNTAIN
4AD, JULY 2006
Bowie sings on "Province".

DAVID GILMOUR
ARNOLD LAYNE, EMI, JAN 2007
Bowie sings.

SCARLETT JOHANSSON
ANYWHERE I LAY MY HEAD
RHINO, MAY 2008
Backing vocals on "Falling Down" and "Fannin Street".

CELLULOID HEROES

Bowie's soundtrack work

"Original soundtrack composed by David Bowie..." It sounds like such a perfect fit, but Bowie has never composed a full *movie* score; he even had his ideas for *The Man Who Fell To Earth* rejected by Nic Roeg. Nonetheless, Bowie's bespoke contributions to film soundtracks have been significant, bringing him eight hit singles, four of which ("Cat People", "This Is Not America", "Absolute Beginners", "Underground") broke the UK Top 40.

CHRISTIANE F. – WIR KINDER VOM BAHNHOF ZOO
RCA, APRIL 1981
A Bowie soundtrack that gathered up tracks from his 1976-79; the ideal backdrop to this German film's examination of the '70s Berlin drug scene. Includes "Helden".

BAAL RCA, MARCH 1982
A return to Berlin's Hansa By The Wall studio for Bowie, and to his interest in one of the city's famous residents. Bowie, of course, also played the title role in this BBC adaptation of Brecht's 1918 play.
TRACKLISTING Baal's Hymn/ Remembering Marie A/Ballad Of The Adventurers/The Drowned Girl/Dirty Song

CAT PEOPLE MCA, APRIL 1982
Bowie wrote the lyrics and performed the title theme "Cat People (Putting Out The Fire)", as well as humming on "The Myth". Giorgio Moroder composed the music and the rest of the score for Paul Schrader's erotic thriller.

THE FALCON AND THE SNOWMAN EMI, MAY 1985
Bowie joined the Pat Metheny Group for "This Is Not America", which became a No 14 UK hit single.

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS
VIRGIN, APRIL 1986
Julien Temple, a collaborator with Bowie on numerous music videos, directed this '50s-set musical with Bowie playing ad exec Vendice Partners. The title track you'll know, but Bowie also contributed "That's Motivation" and "Volare", which he sings in Italian.

LABYRINTH EMI, JUNE 1986
Bowie's involvement in Jim Henson's fantasy film might be infamous for his codpiece, but the music fits quite neatly into his '80s work, especially "Underground" (which features Luther Vandross in a gospel choir) and "As The World Falls Down". The other cuts bear the marks of being written for a children's film.
BOWIE TRACKS 1. Opening Titles Including Underground/3. Magic Dance/5. Chilly Down/7. As The World Falls Down/9. Within You/12. Underground

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS
VIRGIN, DECEMBER 1986
Roger Waters was responsible for the majority of the soundtrack, but the title track was Bowie's.

PRETTY WOMAN
EMI, MARCH 1990
The Gass Mix of "Fame 90" turned up here first.

SONGS FROM THE COOL WORLD WARNER BROS, JULY 1992
After the dissolution of Tin Machine, Bowie's first solo release was "Real Cool World" the main theme for the reality-meets-cartoon film *Cool World*, recorded during the *Black Tie, White Noise* sessions.

SHOWGIRLS
INTERSCOPE, DECEMBER 1995
Two years before *Earthling*, an early rough mix of "I'm Afraid Of Americans" on the soundtrack to Paul Verhoeven's stripper odyssey. It even has a different chorus: "*I'm afraid of the animals*".

MOULIN ROUGE!
INTERSCOPE, MAY 2001
Eden Ahbez's 1947 ballad "Nature Boy" bookends the film: John Leguizamo opens proceedings and Bowie's version appears over the closing credits, as remixed by Massive Attack. The soundtrack also contains Bowie's version, and a Beck cover of "Diamond Dogs".

RESEARCH AND WRITING: ALEX SPENCER

Oh show him the way to the next whisky bar! Bowie in *Baal*

Stop me

if you've heard this one before

APRIL 1979: ALLAN JONES is sucked into a nasty tiff between David Bowie and Lou Reed...

LOU REED'S JUST played a famously cantankerous show at the Hammersmith Odeon, half the audience walking out when he announces he's not going to play "Heroin", which he does as soon as they're off the premises, the set ending with a 45-minute version of "You Keep Me Hanging On", sung by his bass player and played at excruciating volume.

My ears are still ringing on the way out, when I get word that Lou wants to see me backstage for a drink. When I get there, Lou's already split with Bowie, for dinner at the Chelsea Rendezvous in South Kensington. Lou's left an invitation for me to join them there. Dinner with Lou and The Thin White Duke? I'm off to South Ken like a shot.

This is what I find at the Rendezvous: Lou and David in a huddle at the head of their table. Lou's got his arm around David's shoulder. David is smiling. Lou's laughing, slapping the table. I'm called over by Lou.

Bowie looks up at me.

"Allan," he says, extending a hand.

"David," I say, taking it.

"Nice to see you," says David. "How are you?"

His charm is overwhelming.

"ALLAN!" roars Lou.

"Lou," I reply, less raucously.

Lou grabs my hand, nearly breaking my finger. He yanks me across the table. I almost end up in Bowie's lap. I have an elbow in the remains of Lou's dinner.

"Do you know Allan?" Lou asks Bowie.

"We meet occasionally," he tells Lou.

"Did you see the show tonight?" Lou asks me. I tell him I'm still recovering, which makes him laugh. "Good," he says. "What did you think?"

"I felt like I was being given a pistol-whipping."

"You probably deserved it," Lou snaps.

I decide to leave them to their supper.

"Yeah," says Lou. "Go."

I go. Lou turns back to David. They get their heads down, the old pals' act well under way. Lou gets up and waddles down the restaurant to talk to some people at a nearby table. He grabs a chair for Bowie, who's followed him. There's a great deal of mutual backslapping, good times remembered. Lou orders Irish coffee. Lou and David raise their glasses in a toast. "To friends."

It's a touching scene. They resume their original places, resume their conversation. Five minutes later, the place is in uproar. Bowie's said something to Lou. Lou isn't amused. He fetches David a smart crack about the head. Fists are flying. Most of them are Lou's and they're being aimed at Bowie. David ducks, tries to protect himself. Lou is on his feet, screaming furiously at Bowie, still lashing out. "Don't you EVER say that to me!" he bellows hysterically. "Don't you EVER fucken say that to me!" About nine people pile on Lou, wrestle him away from Bowie. There's an arm around his throat. He continues to spit insults at Bowie, who sits at the table staring impassively, clearly hoping Lou will go away, fuck off and calm down. Lou shrugs off his minders (or are they Bowie's?). There's a terrible silence. People are watching, open-mouthed. Lou sits down next to Bowie. They embrace. There's a huge sigh of relief. Lou and David kiss and make up. Meals are resumed, more wine is brought. It looks as if the tiff has blown over. The next thing I know, Lou is dragging Bowie across the table by his shirt and smacking him in the face. The place explodes in chaos again. Whatever David had said to precipitate the first frank exchange of conflicting opinions, he's obviously rather foolishly repeated. "I told you NEVER to say that," Lou screeches, batting David about the top of his head. David cowers. Lou gets in a few more solid punches before he's hauled off the whimpering Bowie. Lou struggles with minders, tries again to launch himself at Bowie.

When they were friends: Reed and Bowie kiss at 'The Last Supper' aka the Ziggy Stardust farewell party, the Café Royal, Piccadilly, July '73

> Bowie **grabs me** by the lapels and starts **shaking** me. I think of **headbutting** the little squirt, but don't...

The silence that follows is ghastly. Lou's party decide it's time to leave. Lou is escorted out by an especially burly minder, who frogmarches him to the exit, a restraining arm around his shoulders. Lou's face is set in a demented scowl. He doesn't look back.

Bowie's left at the head of the table, which is covered in debris. He's sitting with his head in his hands and appears to be sobbing. I wander over. Bowie asks me to join him.

"There isn't a chair," I tell him.

"Then sit on the table," he replies, a little testily. I sit on the table, tell him I'm sorry his reunion with Lou seems to have ended so disastrously. "I couldn't quite hear what was going on... Lou seemed very upset..."

"Yes," says Bowie, wearily. He seems close to tears.

"It was nothing. It's all over," says Bowie's female companion, looking at me suspiciously

"It isn't," says Bowie, eyes glaring.

"Are you a reporter?" someone asks.

I admit I am and I'm told to leave.

"David's just invited me to sit down," I protest. "I was just wondering what happened."

This does it. Bowie leaps to his feet. "FUCK OFF!" he shouts. He means me. "If you want to know what happened, you'll have to ask fucking Lou. He knows what fucking happened."

"But he's gone," I tell Bowie.

Bowie, angry now and showing it, turns on me, grabs me by the lapels and starts shaking me. I think for a moment of headbutting the little squirt, but don't.

"Just FUCK OFF!" Bowie swears, shoving me back. "You're a journalist – go and fucking find him. Ask him what happened. I don't know."

He pushes me again, turns away, knocking over a chair. I'm grabbed from behind and dragged back to my table. Bowie sits down. Then he stands up. He starts throwing the furniture around. "Ahhhh, FUCK!" he declares.

He pushes his way through the restaurant, kicking chairs out of his way. He begins to climb the stairs to the street. Most of the steps on the staircase are decorated with potted plants. Bowie smashes most of them on his way out. He kicks a few, upends the others.

There's a terrible mess. The remaining guests are speechless at this further outburst. The waiters look on, astonished. We share their amazement, my companion and I.

"I think you've just upset The Thin White Duke," she says.

"I think perhaps I have," I reply.

Allan Jones

MICK ROCK/RETNA

生命の速度

Sukita | Bowie

SPEED OF LIFE

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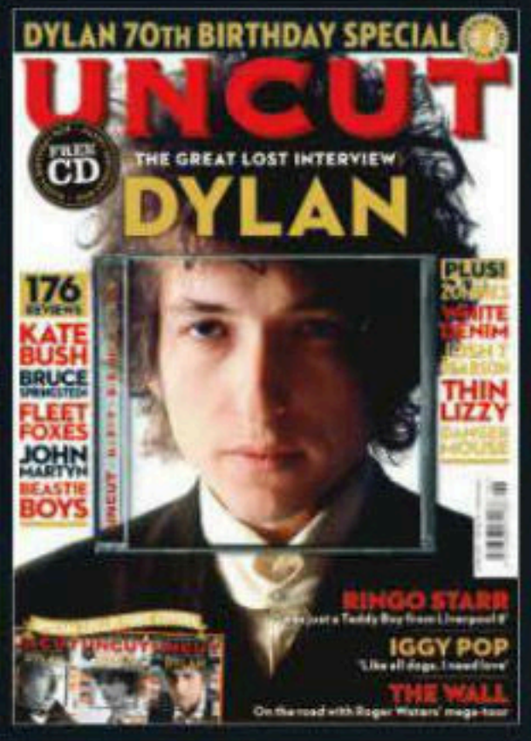

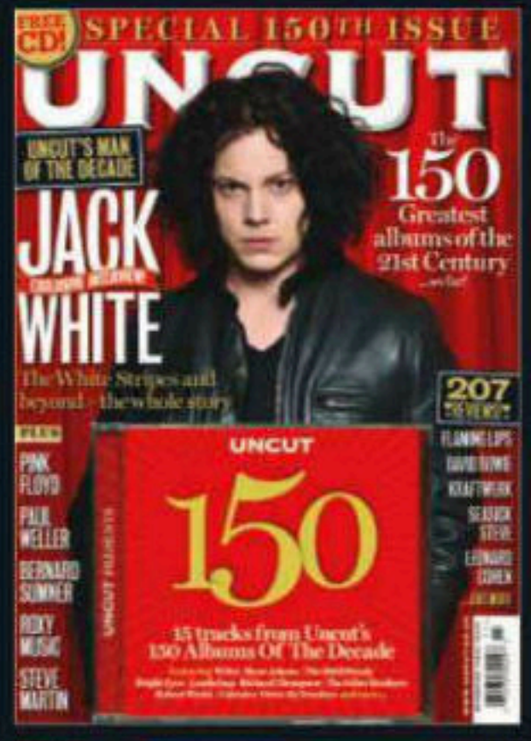

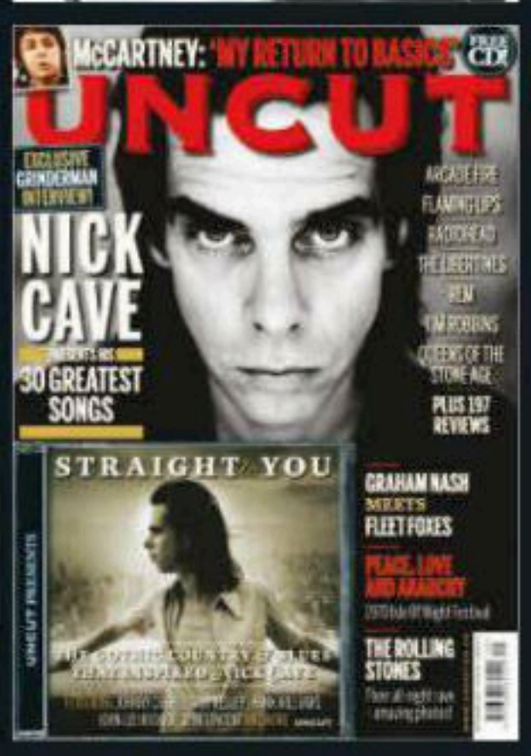

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